

THE INHERITANCE

JOSEPHINE DASKAM BACON

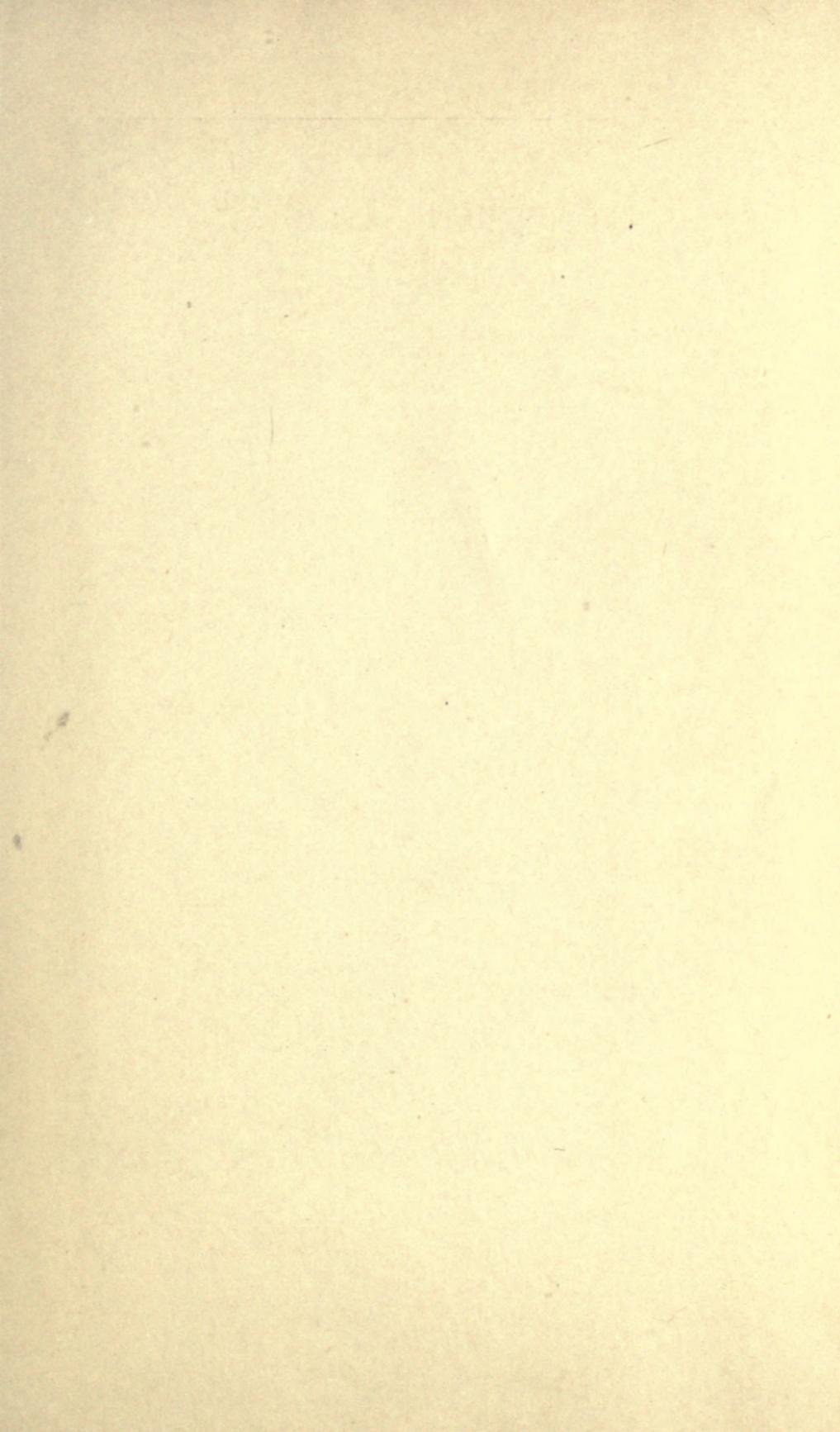
~~1940~~ 1940 1st Ed 75

1612-153

~~size~~ X

UNIV. OF CALIF. LIBRARY, LOS ANGELES

The
INHERITANCE





“And you thought I saw him kiss you, too, I suppose?”

[Page 326]

The INHERITANCE

BY

JOSEPHINE DASKAM BACON

AUTHOR OF

"THE MADNESS OF PHILIP," "MARGARITA'S SOUL,"
"THE MEMOIRS OF A BABY," ETC.



ILLUSTRATED

NEW YORK AND LONDON
D. APPLETON AND COMPANY

1912

COPYRIGHT, 1912, BY
JOSEPHINE DASKAM BACON

Published August, 1912

Printed in the United States of America

TO B. J. D.

IN MEMORIAM

*The sunbeams flash across the pool,
The August trees lean toward the blue,
Below the bridge glide minnows cool,
The urchins hail you, free from school—
But where (with rod and reel) are you?*

*Down the still air the red leaves sail,
The good sun bakes the orchards through,
The katydid begins her wail,
For you the old wood spreads her trail—
But where (with dog and gun) are you?*

*The fire roars up the chimney wall,
The plates are filled, the songs are new,
The boys and girls, your subjects all,
For you still wait, for you still call—
But where (with pipe and glass) are you?*

J. D. B.

July, 1912.

C O N T E N T S

CHAPTER	PAGE
I.—IN WHICH I INTRODUCE MYSELF—THE HERO	I
II.—IN WHICH I GO A-CHARING, FOR THE FIRST AND LAST TIME	13
III.—IN WHICH I DISCOVER AMERICA	19
IV.—IN WHICH I LOOK ABOUT ME	27
V.—IN WHICH I INTRODUCE THE READER TO CHRISSY	38
VI.—IN WHICH I TAKE YOU TO A CHRISTENING PARTY	55
VII.—IN WHICH I BEGIN MY EDUCATION	65
VIII.—IN WHICH YOU MAY RENEW YOUR ACQUAINTANCE WITH CHRISSY	82
IX.—IN WHICH I GROW UP	98
X.—IN WHICH WE BEGIN TO LEAVE THE NEST	123
XI.—IN WHICH I GO TO FIND MY INHERITANCE	134
XII.—IN WHICH I SEE LIFE	144
XIII.—IN WHICH I GLIMPSE MY INHERITANCE	170
XIV.—IN WHICH I TASTE OF STOLEN WATERS	188
XV.—IN WHICH I RENOUNCE MY INHERITANCE	206
XVI.—IN WHICH WE SETTLE DOWN	227
XVII.—IN WHICH BERT PAYS HIS SCORE	236

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
XVIII.—IN WHICH WE RIDE TO MEET TROUBLE	244
XIX.—IN WHICH THE DOCTOR GIVES UP DRIVING FOR SOME TIME	263
XX.—IN WHICH I BREAK THE NEWS TO CHRIS- SY	267
XXI.—IN WHICH WE MANAGE, SOMEHOW	277
XXII.—IN WHICH THINGS TAKE A TURN	294
XXIII.—IN WHICH YOU MAY OR MAY NOT BELIEVE.	301
XXIV.—IN WHICH WE TAKE OUR EASE	310
XXV.—IN WHICH MY EYES ARE OPENED	323
XXVI.—IN WHICH WE GO HONEY-MOONING	332
XXVII.—IN WHICH I COME INTO MY INHERITANCE	338

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

FACING
PAGE

“‘And you thought I saw him kiss you, too, I suppose?’”	
	<i>Frontispiece</i>
“‘Will he cure her out of the black bottle, Nana?’” . . .	46
“‘I hope you feel that we’ve done our best by you.’” . . .	140
“The wagon swayed and lurched.”	256

THE INHERITANCE

A ROMANCE OF THE FAMILY

CHAPTER I

In Which I Introduce Myself—the Hero

THE first words that I remember in my life were French. I can dimly see a great blue blur, which I now know to have been the ocean; there was a comforting, sun-warmed substance under me, yielding, yet hard, slipping through the fingers, yet susceptible of manipulation, which I believe now to have been sand; there were intermittent articles, self-propelled, crossing my field of vision, some dark and bifurcated, some floating and many-coloured, which I infer to have been the garments of perambulating adults with heads altogether out of my view. One of these coloured, billowy articles stopped and did not go sailing by my tiny outlook, but presently lowered itself till a face neared my level. Then I was aware of a sweet odour like flowers—but there were no flowers about—and a row of flashing white teeth: there were shiny eyes somewhere above the teeth, but I don't remember any cheeks or nose or hair. (Subsequent studies in anthropology, however, have convinced me that there must have been all three of these usual features of humanity.)

THE INHERITANCE

“Quel ange d’enfant!” cried a voice, and I must have understood, for I distinctly recall my reply.

“Je ’sommes pas ange! J ’som’ bébé!” I said with dignity, and the teeth and eyes flashed, again and again the high laugh sounded, with other laughs, deeper, coming from far above. Even so, I suppose, Jove’s thunderous peals awed and irritated the helpless underlings in ancient days.

I made a brief visit to Normandy about twenty years later (ah, what a visit!), and something in the air, the shape of the white beaches, the glint of the sun on the sails, struck home to me so quaintly, so conformably, that I have never had a doubt since that my first consciousness awakened there, though Nana could not or would not confirm this intuition, reiterating that she had no idea what part of the French country we were in, but that the tea was nasty enough, no matter where it was! We must have been there for some months, for when I first heard French spoken again, nine or ten years afterward, it had a perfectly familiar ring, though I couldn’t, of course, understand it. But I had the feeling that I *should* understand, presently, if it went on long enough, and Bert told me later that my lips moved unconsciously and that I tried to follow the silly gabble and looked like a donkey.

I can see the brown, stained schoolroom now, the dusty blackboards, the hacked forms, the enticing boughs waving out of window, and the shuffling, inattentive class. One ray of sunlight struck the bald, nervous head of the little French teacher and shone on the scanty greyish locks carefully arranged over the ears. He was slightly asthmatic, and when he wheezed chirpily :

“Maintenant, messieurs, nous commençons à parler Français, hein?” everybody laughed, promptly and loudly, after the tactful, encouraging fashion of early boyhood.

I INTRODUCE MYSELF—THE HERO

Everybody but me, that is. I stared and grew hot and stared harder, and the poor little man, who had supposed the derisive mirth of the others to be an enthusiastic and spontaneous tribute to the beauty of his native tongue, mistook my excited interest for contempt, and glaring fiercely at me, reproved my bad manners and became instantly possessed of a cordial dislike of me. In view of such possibilities of error at the time of the erection of the famous Tower of Babel, I can hardly wonder at the incipience and persistence of the subsequent race-feuds; for I, being on the whole a favourite with my teachers, since I was quick, well mannered (compared with American boys) and apt at fitting together the bits of information I had picked up from the reading of miscellaneous fiction, was undoubtedly a little spoiled and accustomed to finding my presence in the class-room appreciated, and M. Merot's obvious dislike of me produced a not unnatural enmity which required more than a school term to smooth over.

But we straightened it all out, ultimately, and before another year he had solemnly presented me with an autographed copy of his "Grammar and Conversation Book for Beginners in the French Language with Compendious Verb-forms Attached," and "Hommages de l'auteur" in a beautiful pointed hand on the title page. To this day (if he is alive, which isn't likely, as he was frightfully bilious and continually going into rages directly after his meals) I haven't the remotest doubt that he regards me as a cynical young savage, tamed and refined, in spite of myself, by the ameliorating influences of his society.

But to return to my reminiscences: the boat is the next thing I can be sure of, and a tremendous boat it seemed to me. We must have had a rough passage, for I believe children are not commonly afflicted with *mal de mer*, not

THE INHERITANCE

deeply so, at any rate. This must have been the opinion of the fussy little Frenchman who told Nana as she supported me tenderly and urged me to "get it over and be done with it," not to *fâcher* herself unnecessarily, since "*les enfants ne sont jamais malades, madame.*" At this I stared sadly at him, and remarked succinctly:

"*Mais-z-oui, monsieur, je le suis!*" and promptly vindicated my judgment, to his disgust and horror—for I was much too near him. I have never been a good sailor.

The next thing that I remember may lead to a valuable psychological theory as to when the influences of costume begin to make themselves felt upon the infantile character, for it is my gradual but unmistakable descent, sartorially speaking, that has most deeply impressed me. I distinctly recall a blue velvet suit with wide white cuffs and a black cap like a Cossack's, with a sort of abbreviated plume stuck into it, also shiny boots with tassels on the top. I had plenty of pocket-handkerchiefs, too, for I remember that I was accustomed to blow my nose, frequently, and with somewhat of a flourish, moreover, for it was a recent accomplishment, and I was very proud of it. I had the neatest possible pinafores, too, for playing about of mornings, with deep, useful pockets and a kind of ornamentation upon the chest for which I had at that period, naturally, no name, but by the effect of which I must have been impressed, because, when I saw a pinafore like it on a burly peasant in a hunting print in the office, years afterward, and asked Chrissy what such a garment was called, and she told me it was a smock-frock, I answered:

"That's what I wore when we lived in London."

"Yes, the English children wear them, but we don't in the States," she instructed me, and I thought it was a pity, for I admired them.

I INTRODUCE MYSELF—THE HERO

“When I have children they shall wear them,” I remarked, and she laughed at me.

“Boys don’t say, ‘when I have children,’ ” she said; “girls say that.”

“But men *do* have children,” I persisted; “the doctor has children, four of them, hasn’t he?”

She looked puzzled, and her eyebrows touched and made a straight dark line across her face.

“Y-yes,” she said, “that’s true. He has. I must think about that.”

She thought, and I waited respectfully for her, for I revered her judgment greatly.

“And there isn’t any mother there, only Aunt Addie,” she added. “I don’t believe there was, ever. But, all the same, Hugh, I’m sure it’s the mothers that have them—mostly.”

She never changed much, bless her! I never met a woman with her capacity for altering an opinion, once formed on a practical basis, when new evidence, apparently of value, entered the question. She included it, in the whole case, like a man. I don’t mean that she affected thus to include it, out of policy, or to humour her antagonist, but that she did include it. And I don’t mean that the evidence was always of the character just described!

Well, well, I had got to London, I believe, London, and our greatly increasing poverty there—for, of course, that is what the poor clothes must have meant. I was growing rapidly, I suppose, for the last I remember of the blue velvet suit, it was away above my knees, and I blew my nose on anything handy, and the Cossack bonnet I wore mostly around my neck by the strings, it was so much too small. But Nana always made me carry it, attached, at least, to my person. It was her emblem of gen-

THE INHERITANCE

tility, her symbol of my ideal in spite of my actual appearance.

"I'll not have you about bareheaded like that horrid rough street lot," she told me. "Remember you're a gentleman, deary, and above such as them. Don't pay no heed to their naughty talk—it's not for such as you. You'll be riding through them in your carriage, some day."

At which I bridled and looked haughty and agreed with her—though heaven knows it was no neighbourhood to tempt the possessor of a carriage to excursions!

It was, in fact, an extremely dirty and disagreeable neighbourhood, and whether it looked or smelled or sounded most shocking would have been hard to say. We had come into it (and down to it) rather hastily! We were always growing a little dirtier and more disagreeable. At one period we had boasted some geraniums in the window and sat at a table with napkins, which Nana pinned round my neck, herself, somewhat obtrusively, with an eye on the slavey that waited on us.

"Please to tell the young person that brings in the tray that I prefer to attend to the young gentleman myself, Mrs. Fibbs," she told the keeper of the lodging house, and Mrs. Fibbs said ingratiatingly:

"Yes, certainly, by all means, Mrs. Palse, and a handsome young gentleman, too, and a great credit to you, that he is! I will say, as I tell Fibbs frequent, his parents should be forever grateful to you for the beautiful manners you've kep' him to, and very wise, too, considering he'll soon meet them again, I suppose?"

"I suppose so," said Nana smoothly, and Mrs. Fibbs tossed her head disgustedly and left.

At that time Nana wore neat black, with white cuffs and collar and a big cameo brooch, with a hunter pointing

I INTRODUCE MYSELF—THE HERO

a gun (for some mysterious reason) toward a dog at his feet, engraved on it. Her hands were quite soft and she combed my hair twice a day, and we walked in a charming park where there was a pond, and I played with the children in my velvet suit and she sat on a bench with some small sewing and chatted with the other nurses. I know she was much respected among them. I have heard more than one ask for her opinion as to eruptions on the back or repeated and inexplicable attacks of hiccough or an incurable tendency to biting if annoyed or crossed in any way.

Once as I was floating some sticks across the pond in company with a charming little creature in a pink hood edged with white fur, a very beautiful lady with a sad face (children always notice sadness in a face) and a black, black veil that hung down over her dress came and sat down on the bench near Nana and, after a few moments, put a small black glove on her knee.

"I beg your pardon, nurse," she said in a sweet, crying sort of voice (as I called it in my mind), "but may I ask you if you have had the care of that little fellow for long?"

Nana jumped and stared at the lady, but collected herself and said rather coldly, I thought, for such a pretty lady:

"Yes, madam, I've taken care of him from an infant."

"Ah . . . then you are probably much attached to him, and would not care to consider a change?"

Nana looked much relieved and unbent distinctly, at which I was pleased.

"Why, thank you, Ma'am, I'm afraid not," she said, with a respectful pity for the black veil.

"I am anxious to find a nurse for my little boy—I am taking him abroad, perhaps to India . . . my plans

THE INHERITANCE

are unsettled," and she too looked at her veil and her lovely eyes filled with tears.

"I'm sure, ma'am," Nana said kindly.

"I have been watching you with your little charge, and I liked your manner so much. I took a great fancy . . . a good nurse would be worth a great deal to me —a great deal."

"You're very kind, ma'am, but I'm quite suited. I wouldn't think of leaving my present place," said Nana decidedly, and the lady got up and gave Nana something and moved off to where a little fellow of my own age in black ribbons was playing with a footman in mourning livery.

"Well, well, it's you for luck, Mrs. Palse, dear," said Pink-hood's nurse discontentedly, "that was Lady — (I missed the name), and it'd mean a place for life, I'll lay my new bonnet!"

"Indeed," Nana returned with composure; "I'm sorry for the poor young widow, then."

"You must have a rare berth of your own," the other grumbled, but respectfully.

"I'm satisfied with it, for one," said Nana, and, putting away her sewing, called me to come home, as she always did when anyone pressed her in the least.

Pink-hood's nurse would have been surprised had she followed us to our unpretentious lodgings, but surprise would have inadequately expressed her feelings, I am sure, could she have watched the stages of our descent from the napkin-geranium home, which gradually assumed the proportions of a luxurious palace in my memory; and by the time we had reached the dingy, smelling court I remember best, because we stopped there longest, she would have long since dismissed us from her genteel consideration.

I INTRODUCE MYSELF—THE HERO

By that time we were often hungry. It was long before I suffered, for Nana assured me she was not hungry these days, not to say hungry, that is, and if I didn't eat the victuals they'd go begging. I often wished they *would* go begging, for they were not very palatable victuals, to tell the truth. In the beginning of the scarcity, though bread and tea with an occasional egg were all that Nana seemed to care for, there was always a chop for my dinner with a baked potato, and nearly always an apple for dessert. By and by the apple ceased to be forthcoming, and after that the chop appeared at rare intervals, and finally ceased, too, until second-day loaves and skim-milk were all that could with any surety be counted on, and my diet was practically the same as hers. It was the same with our clothes. At first, though Nana's collar and cuffs slipped away from her neat black dress and her shoes grew shapeless and broken and her old mantle got spoiled with the rain, I went brave in morning pinafore and afternoon velvet, and the plume in the Cossack hat was curled magnificently over the tea-kettle; but little by little these small niceties relaxed, the velvet suit became frankly anachronistic, the pinafors wore out, my shoes lacked not only tassels (at which I complained), but soles and uppers (which didn't trouble me so much) and before long I was as poorly dressed as she.

What Nana did I don't know, but I suppose she must have gone out charing, like most of the women in the neighbourhood. She left early and got back at dark, and I spent the day with Hannerellen, the minder.

“What's a minder?” I asked Nana disconsolately when first she informed me of my fate.

“A girl that minds, o' course, deary, and Hannerellen's a good, kind girl—trust me to see to that before I'd

THE INHERITANCE

put my own boy with her ; some o' them minders is awful to the children," she assured me.

Hannerellen *was* kind. I suppose her name to have been Hannah Ellen, but it is a supposition merely, and I offer it as such. I was the only boy among her charges, of whom there were five, and entered her peripatetic school at the regular rate of sixpence a day. It was high, but Hannerellen was worth it, and knew her worth. Her terms included surveillance from six to six, Sundays excepted (Saturdays a half holiday for the parent if wished, but nothing deducted) ; the administration of lunch (provided by parent) and all required drinks of water (provided by the City) ; noses wiped carefully and any other personal attentions as required ; street crossings guaranteed and all addresses on a slip of paper in the bosom of her frock, in case of accident. I was strong and cautious, and in consideration of admitted assistance at the crossings and such good manners that I was easy to manage and not quarrelsome, having always obeyed Nana implicitly and being utterly ignorant of the bad words Hannerellen so deplored in her *clientèle*, my rate was reduced to fivepence, and I became a sort of lieutenant to the party and always took my drink of water last.

Hannerellen grew very fond of me and I of her. She confided her ambitions to me (one of them was to become a school teacher and the other to taste roast chicken and currant jelly), and I told her about the napkin-and-geranium palace, where I had tasted both, when the velvet coat came to my ankles.

"My! No wonder you ain't like the others," she would say, "you're a gentleman, Master Hugh, it's easy seen."

"Oh, yes, I'm a gentleman," I would answer simply. "I'll be riding in my carriage some day."

I INTRODUCE MYSELF—THE HERO

I must have been about five. . . .

Then came the day when Nana decided to take me with her, charing, and save the fivepence.

“I could go a bit—say, part way—in a bus, then, my dear,” she told Hannerellen, “and get him a mug o’ milk with the rest and leave him in the airey—most always the cook’d keep an eye on him, and he’s sensible and quiet. And we could walk home. But I get sort o’ faint like, walkin’ so much, to tell you the truth. I’m not used to it.”

“I know that, Mrs. Palse. But I fair hate to think o’ losin’ Hughie. Maybe I could take ‘im for thruppence, and he does a good bit o’ mindin’, anyways.”

I think I determined then never to forget Hannerellen.

“Master Hugh,” said Nana with a meaning glance at my poor little minder, “*Master Hugh* is much obliged to you, Hannerellen, but it’s best as I’ve planned, and will you have a bit o’ supper with us, since you’re here?”

I stared at this, frankly, for I had made up my baby’s mind, rather drearily, to skim-milk and second-day bun, and I was unprepared for the contents of Nana’s newspaper. She warmed a bit of cooked steak for me, served the abashed Hannerellen with half of a jam tart, rather crushed, and a buttered roll, and nibbled at a bit of the stale bun herself, saying lightly that she had dined late and was not hungry. I thank God that I am utterly unable to remember the dark rings that I now know lay under her eyes nor the gauntness of her cheek-bones nor the ring of her cough. Her boots were nearly gone.

And here is a wonderful thing. Hannerellen was fully thirteen and shrewd, with the terrible shrewdness of the London tenement child. She knew, if she had stopped to think, that Nana was weak and ill with overwork and worry and hunger; she must have realised that there

THE INHERITANCE

was something extremely odd, to say the least, in the presence in such a place of a young gentleman who contemplated driving in his carriage in the near future; she had never, I am sure, so much as heard my surname.

And yet, so potent is a strong will, so enormous the force of a determined personality, that she and all that overworked, underfed little world we lived in implicitly accepted us at our face value, never dreamed that we were doing other than we chose, and would never have presumed to suggest to Nana that she needed her own share of those broken meats in a newspaper, the undoubted gift of a compassionate servant. And people used to doubt the claims of hypnotism!

CHAPTER II

In Which I go a-Charing, for the First and Last Time

I REMEMBER so well that next morning, a "London regular" as to weather, all choking, yellow, wet fog. Nana coughed and strangled in it, and I clung to her cold, roughened hand, snivelling mournfully, for I missed Hannerellen, and this woke Nana's jealousy, poor woman, so that she had boxed my ears—which certainly hadn't proved efficacious as far as the snivelling was concerned. I had had a most unsatisfactory breakfast, and had been disturbed in the night by Nana's crying when she thought I was asleep; she explained afterward that she had the toothache. I lagged along, whining out my small discomforts, and Nana coughed from time to time and said nothing; she was sorry for the ear-boxing, I knew.

At last we reached our objective point and were confronted with an enormous van blocking the way. To Nana's surprised inquiries a harassed cook made short answers.

"These is all for storage, missis sails for the States day after to-morrow. She don't require you any more. Yes, it was a bit suddent like, but that's the way in *this* world."

Nana turned silently away, but the cook stopped her.

"Oh! Mrs. Palse, I was to tell you from number thirty-eight that there'd be no call there for anything further. The gentleman's went bankrupt, and they're go-

THE INHERITANCE

ing into lodgings for the present. 'Twas the parlour maid ran out on a message and asked me to tell you and save you the trouble."

Nana must have looked badly, for even that busy cook relented a little from her brisk fatalism.

"Step in and have a bit o' something, won't you?" she asked kindly; "it's as much as my place to stop, for she's as flighty as can be with the moving and all, but you and the young one could rest. It's a bad season to lose two families at once, I know—had you any others?"

"No," said Nana dully, "I hadn't any others. Thank you just as much, though. I don't think we'll stop. Come along, deary."

And we trudged off into the fog again.

It was too much for me. I burst into loud crying and refused to be comforted.

"I'm so cold," I wailed, "and I'm so hungry, Nana! I can't walk all that way! You said I might sit down"

She stopped dead and stared at me curiously, impersonally. There was a look in her I'd never seen before, and it struck a frost into even my baby blood, so despairing, so bitter it was.

"I'll be good, I'll be good," I cried hastily, "I'm not so very tired, truly, Nana! I won't cry any more."

"Poor lambie," she muttered in a low, miserable voice, "a fine Nana I've been to you, after all—starvin' and chillin' you to get you your rights! Much good they'd do you in your coffin! You shan't be hungry any more, lambie—your Nana'll see to that. Stand still by me a minute," and she fumbled in the bosom of her soiled, frayed black gown and drew out a folded envelope. From it she took a small card and—to my amazement—a couple of shillings. Still with that curious, miserable gaze fas-

I GO A-CHARING

tened on me, as if her eyes had been opened suddenly and she had never till then realised what a starving, shivering little object I was, she signalled a drifting hansom and handed the driver the card, the money exhibited plainly in her hand.

“Drive to that, please,” she said and, taking me on her lap in the cab, burst into tears on my shoulder.

I am afraid I was too much excited and pleased with the drive to extend her much sympathy. Indeed I objected violently to getting out and was only comforted by a kind young man who sat in a little room with a green baize writing table and books all over the walls, and amused me very pleasantly by wrapping his hand in his handkerchief and intoning lugubriously:

“*Father, oh, father, I've come to confess—*
Yes, child, yes.”

I was hugely delighted with this pantomime and forgot my empty stomach and my wet feet completely, under the sovereign spell of Art the beneficent. So shall you see the children skipping about some dingy square, when the cracked hand-organ whines out *Non ti scordar*, and even the weary grinder smiles at them and forgets the hunger at home and the heavy winter lurking always ahead for the poor. I often think of this when Aunt Addie wonders testily why the travelling show man pockets the street cleaner's pennies, when there is the Provident Fund all ready for their pitiful coppers and a Burial Company round the corner; and it takes me back in a whiff to that green-baize, calf-bound room, and the freckled young man that had pity on a chilblained, frightened baby and charmed away its troubles for five minutes. For it could not have been more than that before Nana came out of

THE INHERITANCE

an inner, larger room, her face flushed now and her eyes hard and bright, with a dimly seen little, thin gentleman behind her.

"Much wiser, much wiser, my good woman," he was saying in a dry, clicking voice, "and you may depend upon it, I shall remit regularly to any address you may send. Is this the boy?"

"Yes. Come, deary," and she seized my hand—her own was hot.

"No other course could have been of such value to him. He will live to thank you for it yet," said the dry voice. I could hardly lift my eyes from the mysterious handkerchief that still wrapped the freckled fist of the kind young man.

"To thank me for being kept out of his own?" she cried sharply.

"Tut, tut! This is no spirit, Mrs. Palse—no spirit to show. Do you undertake to prove anything to be his own? If so, bring your case immediately to me, and even now I will hand you back your signature! Shall I?"

"No, no," she muttered, "I see it's no use. I only tried to help him. . . ."

"Exactly. Good afternoon, then," and I saw a pair of pepper-and-salt legs vanish behind the door.

Nana cried no more, then, nor at any time after that I ever knew, though now I believe that those nights when she paced the floor, her hands pressed to her head, she had no more toothache than I had.

"I'm all you've got now, lambie," she said as we passed out into the street, and gave me a strangling hug in the doorway, but as I had never had anything or anybody else, to my knowledge, this did not trouble me, and even if it had, subsequent events would have dispelled the trouble.

I GO A-CHARING

For we went home, as nearly as we could, in a 'bus, and stopped on the way and bought a mutton-pie, hot, with potatoes and gravy, and a great fresh loaf, and a pot of new butter, and a boiled pudding in a bag, and a quart of real milk with cream on the top; and when we got home, Hannerellen, who had "dropped around" to hear how I had spent the day, was despatched for coals and a big pot of porter, frothing on the top, and joined us at Nana's request in a hearty farewell supper—"for we're moving out, to-morrow," Nana informed her briefly. The porter was warmed over the fire and I had some—"the child must be fattened and stren'thened," said Nana—and a delicious full-fed drowsiness came over me, and I slept like a top. I drowsed all the next day and she fed me at intervals (I must have been pretty far gone with cold and hunger, when warmth and food stupefied me so) and between these pleasant intervals I was dimly conscious of Nana bent over her sewing, and of Hannerellen feverishly helping her. I slept another night and drowsed another day, still with those pleasant intervals of beef and boiled bread and milk and warm porter, and still the lamp burned late and still Nana sewed and Hannerellen helped her. Then one morning I woke suddenly, alert and fresh with the wonderful recuperation of childhood, and there was Nana, trim in a new black dress with white collar and cuffs and smooth hair under her black bonnet, and whole, new shoes.

"Where's the man with the gun—to pin your collar?" I inquired suddenly.

"Bless the child!" she cried, "to think of that, now! It's gone, lambie, and I can't get it again, but if you're so set on it, I'll try to have another. Let Nana dress you, now."

And there was a fresh little suit with warm under

THE INHERITANCE

flannels, and shiny, new boots and a neat hat with a cockade in it and gloves for my hands. And on the top of a new leather box, full and waiting for the strap, I saw a pile of small handkerchiefs—for me, beyond a doubt.

But there was one thing that struck me forcibly.

“What makes my coat black, Nana?” I asked, as they dressed me with hasty, nervous fingers, “the velvet one was blue.”

“It’s best for you to wear it, deary,” she said briefly. “You may kiss Hanerellen for once, if you like, and say good-bye—you’re going on the big boat now.”

“Good-bye, Master Hughie, good-bye!” cried my faithful little minder, weeping, “I’ll never forget you, never! And you’ll remember Hannerellen, now and again, won’t you, for all you’ll be so high, now?”

“Indeed he will,” said Nana kindly, “though not, o’ course, as a friend, and you wouldn’t expect nor wish it, Hannerellen, I’m sure. But little gentlemen never forgets those as was kind to them, and no more will he, you may depend. He always liked you, Hannerellen.”

“Yes, I always liked you,” I assured her comfortingly, and with that I passed out of her life, and all that dingy court became as a dream to me.

CHAPTER III

In Which I Discover America

OCean travel was a vastly different affair forty-five years ago, let me tell you. To begin with, fewer people travelled on the ocean. Those that did, travelled more seldom and more slowly, and regarded each other with deeper interest and respect—as a more definitely selected class. Now the butcher and the baker “step across the Pond,” as my devoted countrymen put it, for their little holiday, and the candle-stick maker sends his wife and daughter to patronise hotels whose luxury would have amazed my lord and his lady, half a century ago. Any one who had told the captain of the “big boat” Nana pointed out to me from the trunk we sat on that his successors would command the services of electric lifts, roof gardens, gymnasiums and daily papers—that they would, moreover, desire these unreasonable diversions during a trip of less than five days from New York to Fishguard—would have been regarded as dangerously flighty by that vastly important official. In a word, there was more respect for the Atlantic in those days.

And is the air above us, that “blue cerulean” that belonged to the poets exclusively, in the days when I read poetry, is that, too, doomed, and will the school teachers and the authoresses be sailing through it, patronizing Mars over the edge of a Baedeker in their summer holidays, when I am seventy?

THE INHERITANCE

Let us go back, patient reader, to Nana and me sitting on our new trunks, waiting to be told how and where and when to go. Somewhere in the bustle of luggage and sailors and great drays unloading and packets of mail and weeping relatives (for we wept more, forty-five years ago, on embarking upon a long voyage, and had prayers read over us before and after taking it, too) I got separated from her, and was led about by a kindly old gentleman in a white top-hat on a searching party for her.

"She was in black, my boy, wasn't she?" he asked, after a glance at the ribbon around my neck and the streamers to my cap.

"Yes, please," I quavered, and with many a cheery pat on the shoulder he led me at last to a lady, who sat crocheting in the ladies' salon, raised his hat politely, began:

"Here's a little charge of yours, I think, ma'am——" and then dashed away suddenly after some of his luggage, waving his stick and shouting so violently at the porter as quite to drown the mutual remonstrances of both the crocheting lady and myself. For though she was certainly dressed in deep mourning, she was not Nana. She was, in fact, Aunt Addie, and the old gentleman, having achieved this next purpose of Fate, in my regard, disappeared entirely out of my life and I never laid eyes on him again—for all I know, Fate dropped him overboard with a view to stopping the mouth of some special shark, thus blunting its appetite so that She could save the life of some other of the *dramatis personæ*!

"Have you lost your mother, little boy?" the lady asked with sufficient kindness, and I whimpered:

"No, it's Nana."

"Oh, your nurse! Don't be frightened—you'll soon find her. Stay here by me if you like, and she

I DISCOVER AMERICA

will be certain to look for you here. Is your father on board?"

"No, only Nana."

"Ah, I see—poor little fellow!" and she too patted my shoulder kindly. Knowing Aunt Addie as I do now, I feel quite justified in assuring the reader that to her mind my status was as clearly defined as though Nana had delivered a sworn statement of it into her hands. My clothes, though quiet, were of the best materials; my appearance must have been far from unpleasing, for I well remember that, in the days of the park and Pink-hood, all the little girls were eager to play with me and the mothers always complimented Nana upon my pretty ways and curly hair; and finally, and most important of all, Nana's presence and manner were unmistakably those of that triumph of civilisation, the absolutely perfect English upper servant. She would have marked any family as correct, any establishment as "high class." There may be some other division of the human race whose members possess that precise understanding of their own self-respect and yours, that perfect comprehension of easy service without servility, of sympathetic interest without hypocrisy, there may be, I say, possessors of these gifts and graces who are not of this class I have mentioned, but I never met any such. I have been in a position to observe both the feudal zeal of an old French provincial *bonne* and the passionate devotion of a darkey slave, and in each there was, I own, a little too much of the familiar to suit my Saxon taste. But any one who has encountered, on her native heath, an English housekeeper of the old vintage, with the shrewd insight of the Gallic servant, the loyal affection of the negro and the manners of her own mistress, will agree with me that no other nation can show the like. Behold Aunt Addie, then, touched by my black clothes, new, like

THE INHERITANCE

her own; predisposed in my favour by my English voice and ways, and completely won by Nana's respectful thanks on my recovery.

"So this poor little fellow is all alone?" she asked graciously, when (and just because, probably) Nana started off with me. For Aunt Addie detested pushers-in, as she often said, and thought little of people who scraped acquaintance easily.

"He's nobody but me, thank you, madam," Nana answered respectfully, "but I've had him from an infant and no one could think more of him."

"And you are taking him to relatives in America?"

"It's not settled where we shall go, ma'am," said Nana quietly.

There was always something in Nana's reticence that impressed people. She was so neat and immaculate, so controlled, so clearly determined to say as much as she thought wise and no more, that every one felt reproved at the mere suggestion of having intruded. I have seen a dozen people bite their lips after some such question as this of Aunt Addie's and go further than they had intended, perhaps, in their next remark.

"He is very fortunate in having such a faithful nurse, who can be trusted to take such good care of him, I'm sure," she said hastily. "Have you ever been in America before?"

"No, madam, I'm not acquainted with the States at all."

"You'll find things different, very different," Aunt Addie continued with a sigh.

"I've not been there myself for fifteen years. This dreadful war has upset everything so—I suppose my brother has lost his practice in all these four years he was away—and yet, of course, people must be ill just the same, whether there's a war or not, and all I ask is—who's to

I DISCOVER AMERICA

take care of them? Suppose, for instance, you should be terribly ill, or your little boy—how dreadful it would have been if there had been no physician there to take charge of the case, because they were all fighting the negroes—I mean, of course, the Rebels—why, the child's relatives would never forgive you, though it would hardly be your fault, as they sent you here, and you would have had to obey your orders, of course . . .”

“Of course, ma'am,” Nana said quietly.

“But Robert—my brother—is back now, and so if anything *should* happen to the little boy,” Aunt Addie went on, calmly amalgamating, as she always did, her recent suppositions with the existing facts, and treating the result as a natural consequence, “why, I'm sure Dr. Caldwell will be only too glad to attend him. He's had a great deal of experience with children. He has four boys of his own.”

“Indeed, ma'am,” said Nana attentively, “it would be a comfort to feel that there was a good medical man handy by, in a new country, too.”

“Exactly,” Aunt Addie replied, “and that's why I mention it. Do you expect to be anywhere in the neighbourhood of New York?”

“It is very likely, ma'am,” Nana said guardedly, “and for the sake of a good doctor. . . .”

“There would be no objection just where you settled—I see, I see, perfectly,” Aunt Addie went on rapidly, “so long as you were within easy reach of New York. Very natural, I'm sure, and that is just where my brother lives, hardly more than an hour from the city. Ask them if there would be any objection to South Warwick, Connecticut—the water is very good and every one has always admitted the air was exceptional. Write and ask them.”

THE INHERITANCE

"There would be no objection to my going there, I'm sure, ma'am; at first, anyway," said Nana serenely—and the discreet reader beholds us Aunt Addie's protégés from that moment.

Observe the simplicity of the whole affair, I beg you, and bear in mind that when Aunt Addie told the doctor she knew all about us, she honestly supposed she did. Had she not talked steadily every day for two weeks to Nana, who tended her assiduously through the painful results of a rough winter crossing, taught her a new crochet stitch, gave her her arm on the deck and waited on her, generally, so unobtrusively that Aunt Addie, in all simplicity, actually offered her services to an afflicted lady with four sick children! There was no one on board that did not like and admire Nana, I believe. She did not know the meaning of sea-sickness, and even the spoiled, nervous little American children obeyed her involuntarily. Their mothers invariably referred to her as that nice nurse of Miss Caldwell's: we happened to be (in spite of the hardly ended war) the only persons in mourning on the boat, and it was almost inevitable that we should be associated in people's minds. Years afterward I met, professionally, the mother of two young men, Baltimoreans, whom I treated for some unimportant illness, and she recognised me and reminded me of the time we came to America together, "with your aunt, Miss Caldwell, and that kind English nurse, who took care of the twins when I was so sick—you remember, doctor?"

Oh, there's no doubt Fate fitted it all together very neatly! If any one had told Aunt Addie that she had done all the talking, ventured all the assertions, suggested her views as to my establishment in South Warwick and my upbringing there, invented a family for me in England, who, for reasons best known to Aunt Addie, pre-

I DISCOVER AMERICA

ferred to send me to America ; and that Nana had merely assented gravely to part of her chatter and simply kept silence before the rest of it, the good lady would have been seriously hurt. She would have assured that person that she only answered a deserving stranger's questions and gave advice when urged.

And so when we landed in New York, there were three of us for the Doctor to put into the waiting carriage and afterwards into the railway coach, and I am quite convinced—indeed he admitted to me years afterward—that he supposed me to be the son of his sister's maid, when he gathered up the luggage at South Warwick, and was distressed at her need for such an appendage in his democratic household. But she soon undeceived him.

"Can you recommend a good moderate-priced boarding house for Mrs. Palse, Robert? Later she can look about her a little. She has been very thoughtful of me on the trip, and the English always find our prices here so high—I'd like to save her unnecessary expense, though there's plenty, of course—Hughie must have the best—but still, his people might as well be saved from absolute fleecing, such as they'd get in that dreadful Warwick Hotel. . . ."

I can see the look of relief on his face, now.

"Oh, I see, Addie, I thought it meant bringing a child into the house, and I'm sorry to say Bert and Carey both have the measles. But if the lady——"

"She's Hughie's nurse," Aunt Addie interrupted briefly, "and I have never had the measles, Robert. You might have remembered that, I should think."

"And forbidden the boys to indulge in them?" he said laughing. "You haven't changed, have you, Addie? How would the Banks's do for the little boy? They've

THE INHERITANCE

advertised for boarders, now their father's on crutches and the brother's lost his arm."

"Were you in the war? Where's your red coat?" I demanded suddenly, and that was the first time that ever I spoke to the Doctor.

CHAPTER IV

In Which I Look About Me

IF South Warwick had not been suffering from an epidemic of measles when I entered it, I am convinced that my subsequent career there would have been vastly different. In the first place, I should never have been for a month one of the Doctor's household—which was, as I now know, my open sesame to Warwick society at large, ten years later. In the second place, Aunt Addie would not have strengthened her already definite conviction that she knew all about me—which in its turn subtly but unceasingly wrought upon the Doctor till I verily believe he would have said offhand (after a few years) that *he* knew all about me! In the third place, I should never have known the boys, and Hux and Robert and Bert and Cary (poor little Cary!) have been so much a part of my life and my affairs—my profession, my work in the world, which would never have been what it is, but for them—that I simply can't, even in fancy, plan what that life would have been without them.

Let me look back, then, a moment, and take you with me, if I can, so that you can see the old house with my round, childish eyes, as it looked to me that night. It was large—the largest house I had ever been in. A rambling, roomy, comfortable house, set well back from the street, and far from the centre of the village—at that time. Later, the town flowed round it and engulfed it and the pasture that adjoined it came near to being a factory site in the 80's; but at that time it would have been almost too far for a physician, had the Doctor not

THE INHERITANCE

made himself so necessary to the Warwickians that they came (or sent) the mile from the town hall that he moved before Cary was born.

That was five years ago, and Bert was only a year old or so, and remembered his mother as little as the tiny thing she left behind her. Just as they were reasonably certain that the delicate little fellow was firmly settled in this world and meant to add to his months of sojourn in it, the war broke out, and the Doctor went out with his regiment, and sent for his sister Cary to take care of the children, which she did to every one's satisfaction until her own soldier-lover came back to her, with a bullet in his shoulder, when she promptly married him and handed her four little nephews over to Aunt Addie.

It was on her voyage to take over this charge that we encountered that lady, and so, as a matter of fact, she knew me before she knew them, for she had never seen any of them, though Robert, in his capacity of god-son, wrote her a dutiful letter of thanks each birthday. He was nine, and loomed very large to me, as he stood in the big central hall, one arm over Huxley's shoulder, staring defiantly at us. Hux was as large, in spite of the year and a half between them: they were often taken for twins.

"Well, well, here we are!" said the Doctor, a little wearily, perhaps, for Aunt Addie had discoursed to him on the impropriety of measles at such a time till even I felt embarrassed, for I knew that one couldn't help having them.

"How is everything?"

Rob advanced a step and fixed me with his eye.

"Your little boy had better look out, Aunt Addie," he said instructively, "for the measles is a terrible catching disease."

I LOOK ABOUT ME

"And I'll bet you he gets 'em, too," Hux prophesied gloomily.

These were perfectly characteristic remarks, and I never think of them without a smile!

"Gracious, child, he's not my little boy!" from Aunt Addie, fussily, "he's little Hughie Gordon—and are you Rob? Have you got a kiss for aunty—and Huxley, too? How much they look as you used to, Robert! Do either of the others favour poor Alberta?"

"Bert very much, Cary a little," he said calmly, and though ready tears sprang to Aunt Addie's eyes, he did not even clear his throat.

And here I must digress again to add that I never, even when I came to know him so well, remarked in the Doctor the slightest evidence of feeling at any chance reference—and, indeed, they were very few—to his young wife. He must have loved her, or why should he have been at the pains to marry her against her parents' consent? And yet, beyond her picture in a velvet frame on his bureau and the old square piano with her Scotch ballads in a yellowed pile on it, there was actually no sign nor mention of her in the house. I have heard Aunt Addie painfully questioning the two older boys about her with the doubtfully wise intention of awaking filial memories, but almost in vain. She played on the piano and sewed, yes, and her eyes were grey, they thought, and she told them stories, yes, and of course they loved her. But that was all. She seems to have been one of those curiously colourless souls who pass out of life, leaving no wake behind them. She had added four inhabitants to the world, had borne them in agony, stamped her features on two of them,—and was less to them than the pretty young Aunt who succeeded her! The greatest tragedy of her seemed to be the abstract one: the inevi-

THE INHERITANCE

table sadness of a young mother taken from her children.

And it can't be denied that the Doctor pushed philosophy to an almost stoic point in his relations with life. He worked hard for his boys, exacted little from them, and as each in turn disappointed him (for, one way and another, they all did) mentioned the fact quietly and went on his way; hard working, interested in life as a battle-ground, a spectacle and a laboratory. I really believe that his wife was to him precisely the incident she appeared to be: husbandhood and fatherhood were his as they should be every healthy man's; had the one relation lasted as long as the other he would have been as faithful to it, and it would have occupied its proportionate share of his life. It had not so lasted, and that portion of the book was closed. That was all. It is not the temperament of which the heroes for ladies' novels are made, I grant you that, but it is a temperament that has a bigger *rôle* on life's stage than most ladies' novelists would assign to it.

And so, although Aunt Addie came prepared to comfort two small boys who could not remember their mother, she found that her sympathies were only required, as a matter of fact, for two small boys with the measles. This foe to childhood's liberty was raging through the village, owing to the good old-fashioned method of sending the hitherto immune to play with the victim "so that they could catch them and get them over with," and as there were no trained nurses then, mothers and aunts, older sisters and neighbours relieved each other at the feverish, irritable bedsides.

Dr. Caldwell was in a sad way, for old Bridget, nurse since Huxley's babyhood, was crippled with sciatica, and good, trusty women hard to come by, even for a well-loved doctor, just then.

I LOOK ABOUT ME

I can see him now, as he stood perplexed in the hall, listening to the voluble Norah's reasons for there being no supper, and her all afternoon with the sick children, and all, and the good beefsteak ready for the broiler, but Bert not willing to leave her out of his sight!

"Well, well," he broke in impatiently, "we'll forage for something cold, that's all. Go to Bert, and I'll look at them both, after I've had a sandwich. Then I'll try to see about a place for Mrs.—Mrs.—"

"Palse, sir," said Nana, curtseying slightly, "and I couldn't think of being such a trouble, sir. If it's not taken as putting forward at all, Miss Caldwell, which I'm not one to wish to appear so, I could whisk on my apron and hot up something for the doctor: gentlemen must eat, as we all know."

"Oh, yes, Mrs. Palse, pray do," sighed Aunt Addie, "it would be such a relief. And, boys, take care of Hughie; won't you? Will you show me my room, Robert?"

He started upstairs with her and I started shyly after Nana—my place was always with her, of course. But to my surprise she pushed me gently back. Did I hesitate a little, as I left her, and crossed a bridge I was never to go back over? I don't know. Did her voice break, as she sent me—and stayed behind? I cannot remember.

"No, no, lambie, stay with the young gentlemen," she said quietly; "the kitchen's no place for you."

"Certainly not," Aunt Addie called over the bannister; "boys, haven't you any toys for Hughie? I depend upon you to amuse him . . . I do hope, Robert, there's a southern exposure, I feel the dampness so! I suppose Cary felt she was justified, but the notice was so short . . . you may depend entirely upon Mrs. Palse . . . I

THE INHERITANCE

supposed you knew, my dear Robert, that I never had the measles: Cary had them when you did . . . ”

Thus Aunt Addie up the stairs, across the landing, and on again to the second story. How many of her monologues I was destined to hear! Monologues that trapped the unwary by proceeding steadily for minutes, while attention wandered with impunity, only to stop short with an unexpected direct question, which brought that same listener to a disgraced apology, inevitably!

“I have some white mice, if you like them,” Rob vouchsafed grandly. “I don’t use them much, now. I suppose your mother died, too? We had black suits, when ours did.”

“Yes, please,” I answered timidly, in a general way, and went in search of the mice. (I was rather surprised than otherwise, the next day, to hear Norah telling Nana it was no wonder the poor little fellow took to the boys so, with his mother gone like their own!

“Children make friends quickly at Master Hugh’s age,” said Nana quietly, and went on her inscrutable way.)

So when I went in to supper that evening I sat on the Doctor’s right hand, my hair brushed by Aunt Addie, and Nana waited on us, bringing in first a great hot steak (“I made bold to grill it, sir, though Cook had laid the spider out”), then a mound of mashed potatoes wreathed with pink ham slices, and then, “shall I serve the fruit tart, sir?” says Nana.

“Oho: she means apple-pie!” derided Rob, as it came on, and Aunt Addie corrected him instantly: “Nonsense, Rob, of course it’s tart! I suppose Hugh won’t take any, Mrs. Gordon?”

“No, thank you, madam; Master Hugh will do best with his bread and milk,” said Nana staidly, while I gazed

I LOOK ABOUT ME

with interest at the young lords of creation wolfin' down the steak and ham.

"I see you bring up your little charge properly," the Doctor approved, and Nana nodded respectfully.

"I'm sure I try my best, sir," she said simply.

A hurry call snatched the Doctor from us, just then, but not before he had separated Rob and Hux in one of their frequent rough-and-tumbles (they were devoted brothers, but constantly tempting each other to a fight), soothed Norah's ire at the half of to-morrow's meals all cooked up by the English nurse, and me with me hands full and too full, Doctor, and well you know it!—answered Cary's fretful screams, and sketched out a hasty plan for Aunt Addie's looking for extra help in the morning.

He left, I say, in all this hullabaloo, and doubtless expected to return to it, poor man, but Fate (and Nana) had willed otherwise, for when he came back a scant hour afterwards, I was just ready to go upstairs with Aunt Addie, who embroidered placidly in the sitting-room while Hux and Rob struggled with to-morrow's sums, and I arranged dominoes in gratifying patterns on the rug before the fire.

"There! I forgot to see about the Banks' cottage, after all!" he cried, "and after that delicious supper, too! I haven't had a supper like that in I don't know when."

"You needn't bother, Robert," said Aunt Addie placidly; "Mrs. Palse is going to stop with us till the boys are well—she's had a great deal of experience with sickness. The boys seem to take to her, she says, and then Cook can get back to her kitchen. I know from Cary how hard it is to get decent servants here, and everything will be more or less upset till the sickness is out of the house. She will take the room next to the boys',

THE INHERITANCE

and there's one next hers I had her get ready for Hughie."

"Why—but—Addie," he began, "that would be very lucky for us, but I'm not sure that we have any right—"

Aunt Addie waved her hand regally. "It's quite all right, Robert, I assure you," she said; "I know Mrs. Palse very well (I believe with all my soul that she thought she did!), and I assure you that she makes all her own arrangements of that kind. Besides, as she says, she can look about her, and Hughie will certainly be better off here than in an hotel."

"Oh, well, if you put it that way, I agree with you," he admitted with relief. "It seems a little unusual, but you know the English better than I do, Addie, and I'll be glad to pay anything that's right—"

"Gracious, Robert, I wouldn't think of it!" Aunt Addie exclaimed. "She's a most respectable woman and quite independent. You'll look her out a nice little cottage, of course, and keep an eye on Hughie—I as good as promised her that much—for, of course, he's a heavy responsibility to her, now, so far from the family."

"Why, certainly, Addie—anything I can do," the Doctor answered, one ear at the stairs. But no crying of Cary's, or raging of Bert's sounded from above, and we went upstairs together. When we got to the sickroom I was not so surprised as he, for I had seen Nana at work there. I had watched the dusty litter brushed away, the tumbled sheets replaced with fresh linen, the cool lotion sopped on the blotched faces, the comforting drink gurgle down the parched throats. And now Nana sat, in stiff, clean print, by the shaded lamp, reading gently in her soft English voice (ah, how soon an expatriate begins to notice that voice!) and two quiet little fellows lis-

I LOOK ABOUT ME

tened drowsily to the moving tale of the Babes in the Wood.

"Well, well!" said Dr. Caldwell. And that was all, but it spoke whole volumes, and Nana appreciated them and curtseyed gratefully.

"I hope there's no objection to us stopping while I look about me, sir?" she asked tactfully; "I'm well accustomed to the care of the sick, and Master Hugh will be no trouble, I'll warrant him, for I can keep him by me if necessary—he's had the measles it's two years now. Nurse seems fair ill with her own troubles, I see, and I could give her a rub now and then, and if the other young gentlemen *should* come down, and I hear that Cook's not too fond of the village help——"

"You couldn't please me better, Mrs. Palse," said the Doctor, "and I feel more relieved about the boys than I've been since they came down. You're a good nurse, I see."

"Thank you, sir. Then I'll stop a bit. And now, Master Hugh, your bed is ready, and I'll bathe you and settle you before it's time for their next drink."

And by the next morning (so adaptable are we to good fortune!) we were actually settled into what seemed but my natural and simple life to me—who was not three weeks out of a London gutter! Had Nana planned with Machiavellian cunning to make a great gap in my life, a blank that staggered memory, she could have contrived nothing better than the sudden change to shipboard, the position of importance and interest I assumed there, the utter newness of everything in a small country town a whole Atlantic away from my small miseries of scarce a month ago. In a week's time I seemed to myself, very simply, a sort of brother to Bert and Cary, and at least a cousin to the older boys!

THE INHERITANCE

I revered them and thought them—especially Rob—
infallible, but on my own side I was not without great
interest for them. To begin with, though Bridget and
Norah would have died (or worse, left the household!)
if asked to add a prefix to the other boys' names, I was
always Master Hugh to them—nothing else would have
been possible, with Nana's grave example. Then, from
her, at least, the boys enjoyed the same dignity, and
though they grinned covertly at first and mocked one an-
other with the title, it grew, with custom, dearer (as I
have seen titles grow on my adopted countrymen since)
and before the invalids were well downstairs, selected
playmates were inveigled into hanging about the side
porches to hear Nana's unconscious performance as she
called Rob and Hux in to tea!

It was well that she quietly took over this and many
other little responsibilities, for poor Bridget must have
found early that real nursing was a sinecure compared
to attendance on an English lady suffering from change
of climate. Whatever native tendencies to waiting on
herself Aunt Addie may have possessed had long ago
vanished under the insidious spell of *deft English serv-
ice*, and her bell tinkled cheerfully through the short au-
tumn days, till Bridget quite gave up the idea of having
sciatica, as she confided to Nana, for sure there was no
time for it at all!

Not the least of Nana's triumphs, by the way, was her
skillful avoidance of any issue with these two faithful
Paddies (as we called them then). No hint of Hunga-
rian cook, Japanese butler or Swedish parlourmaid had
come to the Land of the Free, at that period of domestic
economy, and it was to the Green Isle that we looked
with one accord for ministering angels of the larder
and broom. Nothing but infinite tact could have enabled

I LOOK ABOUT ME

Nana to conceal her English scorn of the crudeness and the rudeness of the two bare-armed, voluble, warm-hearted Paddies that daily, yes, hourly, shocked Aunt Addie's sensibilities—and worried the Doctor at every shock! And not even her tact, I am afraid, could have made endurable to their loving jealousy her quick supremacy in the headless household, her standing with the Doctor, their idol, even her importance to Aunt Addie, their terror. But circumstances worked for her. Even I could see that the little boys were better under her régime than Bridget's, and the boys were dearer than all to faithful Bridget, who had had them from the monthly, Mrs. Palse, and walked the floor with 'em more nights than ever *they'll* know! And Bridget, freed of all responsibility beyond her kitchen, gained in leisure and peace of mind what she lost in authority—and realised it.

So we lingered and lingered, and before Bert and Cary were well, before the shine was off my new black, before I had remembered to ask Nana when my mother died, even (which I had decided to do, I believe, after Robert's first question about her), the last shreds of my old life had faded to filmy, misty fragments and dissolved in the clear, sunny present of a happy, healthy child among his natural mates and equals.

CHAPTER V

In Which I Introduce the Reader to Chrissy

I WAS between six and seven years old and so I judge that we had been living in America (Nana still called it "the States") for about a year. Nana was sitting placidly at her sewing in the little sitting room and I was playing with some lettered blocks at her feet, for the noon sun was too intense to allow of my going out, she thought—the American August with its cloudless heat alarmed her exceedingly—and the green blinds were down, making a cool dimness in the fresh, clean little cottage. Everything in our house shone and burnished and twinkled with cleanliness. The windows were diamonds, the walls were pearls, the little "yard" with its poppies and phlox was, to carry out the simile, emerald spangled with ruby and coral. The path to the door was edged with oyster shells and the floor, where there was no carpet, was scrubbed with sand. The whole interior was wonderfully restful, for Nana had a hunger for old country surroundings, and in an era of varnished pine atrocities and imitation ebony and jig-saw walnut horrors, had quietly bought at auctions and gratefully taken from overloaded garrets the worn, solid old shapes despised and rejected of the grandchildren of that time—to be paid for by them later and "restored" at enormous cost! Nana did not select the old dressers and high-boys and oaken chairs and tables because she was æsthetic, far from it, but because they reminded her of home and could be purchased for a few dollars.

I INTRODUCE CHRISSY

And so an old clock with wooden works ticked slumberously on the dresser, and an old Windsor chair with a clean, patched cushion and a funny little old footstool stood near the Franklin grate with gilt balls on the top and a big jug of sunflowers where the fire would be, and an old settle, of bog-oak (as we found thirty years later—I refused five hundred dollars for it) painted red then, and softened by means of a worn pew-cushion given her by the sexton of the Methodist Church when she nursed his wife through pneumonia, filled one side of the room and was for me alternately coach, boat and prairie schooner, as well as toy repository and general napping place. There were flowers everywhere, for Nana could not live without them, and never ceased to wonder at the dreary wastes of vegetable tins, dog bones and arid or slimy soil that stretched from her neighbour's doors; to her mind poverty had no excuse for flowerlessness, when a few pennies would purchase a packet of seeds, and slips and cuttings were to be had for the asking. So that hardly a day passed without somebody's inquiring the name of her English wall flower, or purple Canterbury bells or giant mignonette, and more than one lady driving by (for we lived on the outskirts of the town on the way to the Millpond woods, a favourite drive) had stopped to speak about her peonies and fuchsias and left an order for some sewing before she went away.

Well, on this hot August day the Doctor drove up behind his chestnut mare, threw the reins to Thomas, an ex-slave who had gone through the War with him and always called him "Major," jumped out and hurried in to the cottage. For Nana always called it a cottage: it was but a story and a half and had but four rooms and a large closet.

"Can you come with me directly, Mrs. Palse?" he

THE INHERITANCE

asked, with a "Hello, Master Hughie!" for me. "There's a poor lady up by the millpond that's going to need you badly in a few hours. An English lady, and I think you'll be a heap of comfort to her; name's Mrs. Vereker—perhaps I've spoken of her?"

"Yes, sir, I think you have, sir. It's her first, I believe, doctor?"

"Her first what?" said I, and he laughed and said:

"Her first trouble, Master Hughie! You can leave your young gentleman at the house, if you like, Mrs. Palse."

And to this day I don't know why I wasn't "left at the house"; many a day I had spent with Bert and Cary when Nana was similarly occupied. But this time I wasn't; I drove with Nana and Thomas to Mrs. Vereker's, when she had packed her little bag and taken off her apron and hidden the key behind the shutter, and the Doctor said he'd be around presently and see how things were going. They must have gone pretty well for a long time, for he didn't appear, and I wandered, much interested and amused, through the strangest house I had ever entered.

It was a low-eaved, rambling, very old farmhouse, repaired and perfectly weather-tight, but utterly paintless from a century's rains and snows and suns. It stood far back from the road, surrounded with larches, pines and hemlocks, in the midst of tall, straggling weeds and bur-docks and mulleins of every description; the path to the door, a broken flagged walk, was grown thick with grass and moss. The windows were heavily curtained and nearly all closed; there was not an animal or fowl or flower to be seen about.

Nana tried the front door, but it was locked, and indeed a tiny fern was growing up in the crack of it! So we went around and entered by a side door, more in use,

I INTRODUCE CHRISSY

evidently, and Nana asked a middle-aged mulattress who met us there to take her to the lady.

"I'm expected, I suppose?" she asked in her low, competent voice, and the woman nodded and started up the stairs.

"You stop about till I come, deary," said Nana to me, "and mind you don't meddle or touch anything, will you? I'll be down soon," and they left me alone.

I peeped into the kitchen behind me and was gratified to see one of the maids from the Doctor's house there, spreading flannels on a little clothes horse before the fire.

"Well, Master Hughie, you here?" she inquired good-naturedly; "well, well! Hark—what was that up above?"

She dashed up the stairs, and after a comprehensive glance at another mulatto woman, older than the first one, who was stirring something in a bowl, in a corner, and wiping her eyes on her sleeve, I left that part of the house and peeped into what should have been the dining-room.

And here began the strangeness of the house, for the room was packed full and literally running over with books. The dining table was piled high with them, like a counter in a book shop; the sideboard held them in rows; the eight chairs that stood against the walls carried each its load of thick paper pamphlets. Stout pine shelves ran around the room to a considerable height and they too were book-filled. The blinds were down, and a few hot shafts of noon sun struck through little holes in them and gleamed like arrows through the dusty air. And nowhere in the room was a sign or symbol of its original purpose—not a dish nor spoon nor glass. It appeared to have been thus crammed with print for years, with that mysterious but inevitable use-and-wont that stamps the rooms of human habitation and forbids them

THE INHERITANCE

to lie or give even a false impression of the purposes to which they have been put.

We go into so many rooms, we who struggle with the pain and folly of man and womankind, and we grow very wise in the interpretation of them. What is it that tells us, Madam X, as we sit in your drawing room and stare impatiently at your Louis Seize gilt-and-cane while we wait to be summoned to your bedside, that you could not distinguish that monarch from Julius Cæsar or George the Fourth, that the upholsterer purchased them for you when Monsieur your husband made that lucky turn in copper, and that you are secretly afraid to sit on them and would have preferred red plush? The chairs tell us, madam, and we read your alabaster statues on coloured marble pedestals as we read your temperature on our clinical thermometer. And you, kindly Mrs. Y., what is it to us that your sunny bedroom is in perfect, pathetic order, every table in place and your snowy counterpane fresh creased, and only photographs and a trained nurse to fill the deep window sills and roomy rocking chairs? To our shrewd eyes the children clamber down out of the silver frames and fill the chairs with doll babies and guns and wooden horses; their mended stockings overflow from your empty work basket, their dusty shoes soil that lustrous bed covering. The room speaks to us as loudly as your pulse. And when we are hastily called from our hotel, *Contessa Z* (how glad you are of an "American doctor!"), and interrupt our sight-seeing to consult with *il dottore* in your noble husband's Roman palace, how pitifully do your small, hopeless efforts to transport a little of the Anglo-Saxon into those echoing Latin corridors call out to us! It is not the fever that is holding you down, *Contessa*, but the empty, scornful walls, that have echoed for centuries to passions you

I INTRODUCE CHRISSY

can never comprehend, that have been stained with crimes and lighted with visions meaningless to you, but strong enough to wear out even your fresh and furious vitality. Your tapestries tell tales, *Contessa*, and they counsel a change of air quite as strongly as your pallor!

Behold me, then, pushing my way, a curious little fellow, through this dusky cave of volumes, and wondering what they were for. I had never touched a book, so far as I know, beyond Nana's prayer book and her cook book (those two bulwarks of her sex!) and a certain highly coloured history of Cock Robin. But I like to think that they interested me from the first, those calf-bound comrades, and that we took kindly to each other at once.

I went into the next room, a long, low apartment that filled that half of the house, and here again the books crowded every chink and corner. There had been at some time various ornaments and pictures scattered about the room, I suppose, for when the shelves had been put up around the walls the pictures had been taken down and piled here and there on the floor, and there they lay, traps for the unwary feet, while a huddle of dusty vases and shapeless objects filled the four corners of the topmost shelves, relentlessly driven back by the ever-flowing tide of books. They slid from back to seat on the arm chairs, they stood in tottery piles in the open fireplace, they escaped into the narrow, central hall and nestled in little groups in the stair corners. I wondered again what they were for; and picked my way amongst them up to the next floor. Here were two great glass cases of them, stealing nearly all the passageway from the upper hall into which three doors opened. I pushed one cautiously and peered in: it was piled from floor to ceiling, nearly, all around the sides, with stacked periodicals and reviews

THE INHERITANCE

of various colours, each colour arrayed neatly by itself, so that the effect was that of a charming little square room, artificially built up, with a tiny ell where the window was left free to light it: this delighted me hugely, and I planned to play there one day.

At this point a sharp, short cry and a sort of whimpering caught my ear and I stepped out and pushed open the second door, whence it issued. Here was a large and well-lighted room, and though it was nearly as full of books as the others, it was quite different, for it was obviously in occupation. There was a big four-posted bed with dusty, torn hangings and tumbled bed clothes; a heavy mahogany writing table with a great soiled ink-stand in the midst of papers, blotters, pen-racks, maps and sketches; chairs and tables piled with the omnipresent volumes, which lined two of the walls and crowded the chimney-piece and the dressing-table itself, and finally, there were trays of food in various stages of disorder all about the room. Glasses of water stood here and there, odd shoes and slippers peeped from the valances, in the middle of the floor lay a little ring of petticoats, like a nest, just as they had been stepped out of and left. A flannel bed gown had been thrown into one corner, and Nana, her trim neatness more marked than ever in this maelstrom of untidiness, was wrapping another gown about a woman who cowered over a fire in a Franklin grate—a fire, though the locusts were buzzing hotly out of doors.

“There, there,” Nana was saying as I stole softly in; “there, there, poor soul! This is no warmer than the other, but you shall have it, since you’re that set upon it, and change again, if you like; I’m never for thwarting at such times; it’s not good.”

The woman, whose face was deeply flushed and her

I INTRODUCE CHRISSY

eyes scared and glazed, began to whine and moan again, and bowed herself over in the tumbled chair; a book fell off the arm of it.

"Think how soon 'twill be over now, and you so happy, that's a dear," Nana soothed her, "and when it comes again, now, do like I told you, you'll find 'twill ease you. There's many worse off than you, I'll warrant you. Walk about a bit, now, and the Doctor'll be here in no time. And everything all ready, and soon you'll forget it all!"

"No, no, no! Never!" the woman cried and bowed over again in the chair, moaning and clinching her hands.

I looked about for the sick person, but saw no one answering that description, to my mind, and stared distastefully at the litter of candle-sticks and fresh linen and tea-cups that covered the chest of drawers and the streaked dust of the dressing mirror; children have normally, I think, a strong feeling for freshness and order, though they are not often credited with it.

Just then the woman in the chair uttered a sharp, angry cry, and then another; her face distorted, and she alarmed me; I was relieved to see the Doctor step quickly, yet softly—his way—into the room. I knew that he made people feel better.

"You're none too soon, Doctor," said Nana hurriedly; "she's getting a bit wild-like, poor dear—goodness gracious, lambie, how came you here? Run out, now, and play in the front—mind Nana directly, now!"

And at another sight of that crimson, twisted face and another sound of that choked, groaning voice, I ran out willingly enough, only wondering at the pleasant smile the Doctor gave me and his unconcerned greeting, as he took the lady's hand.

"Well, well, Mrs. Vereker, we're getting along, I see, getting along famously!"

THE INHERITANCE

"Will he cure her out of the black bottle, Nana?" I whispered, as she pushed me out of the door, and he heard me—he had the ears of a lynx—and called back good-naturedly:

"Not that bottle, Master Hughie, but I'll cure her, don't worry! Let's have the pulse, now . . ." and I left them leaning over her, and pushed open the third door on that floor.

This room too was, as I had begun to expect, book-lined and book-piled. A great desk full of pigeon holes stood in the exact middle of it, and the heavy carpet displayed a little worn path, about a foot in width, that wound about the room, just as a path winds through a meadow, when the same feet have walked the same route for many years. In an alcove I saw a cot bed, spread neatly enough with a blue-and-white knitted cover of the sort the American housewives used to make, before the inventive Mr. Whitney spared them the necessity of such manual labour, and a tin bath and water can, of a pattern familiar to me, stood at the foot of it. Except for the bed and this bath I believe every article of furniture, save the arm chair before the desk, to have been covered with books: even the footstool bore a fat, heavy volume, open, upon its tiny top.

Standing before the shelves in the act of reaching down a book from one of them, I beheld for the first time Professor Christopher Vereker in the most characteristic attitude of his life. He was a lean, bald gentleman, with kindly, weary eyes, shielded by a green shade, like a sort of scholarly halo, bound about his brow. I never, in all the years of my acquaintance with him, saw him attired otherwise than in a rusty frock coat, with loose grey trousers, crumpled but perfectly clean linen, that had the air of having been made for a much larger man, a



“Will he cure her out of the black bottle, Nana?”

I INTRODUCE CHRISSY

black clerical tie and a red-and-white bandanna handkerchief drifting out of his right trouser pocket. His father-in-law, I learned later, had presented him with a case of these handkerchiefs—some incredible number of dozens—and they had become a part of his personality.

As he reached down his book I coughed slightly and closed the door (for I disliked the steady groaning that came from the other room) and these sounds caught his attention, so that he turned and saw me. His mild stare embarrassed me not a little; he seemed to be looking through me, and I shifted my feet about and coughed again.

"Ah . . . how do you do?" he said at last.

"How do you do?" I answered, relieved. And there our conversation hung fire, so to speak, and we might have been standing there to this day had Nana not appeared, and taken me by the hand to lead me away.

"The nurse, sir," she said, making her quiet little English curtsey. "All's going well inside, sir. Come, lambie," and we turned to go. I shall never forget the extraordinary expression on the Professor's face at that moment. He seemed to come down to earth with a bump and regarded me with a positively dazed stare.

"Is this the—surely this is not—is it all over?" he said vaguely, and Nana, with a whispered *God 'a' mercy!* advanced firmly to him and shook him gently but with decision.

"No, sir," she answered, perfectly respectfully, "no, sir, not yet, sir. This is a grown boy, sir."

"Ah. . . . I had not supposed it *could* be so large . . ." he said, blinking hungrily at his book, half closed out of some dim politeness.

"No, sir, it will be much smaller," Nana assured him, still respectfully (everybody was always quite respectful

THE INHERITANCE

to the Professor, somehow), "and a great comfort and blessing to you, I'm sure, sir——"

"Mrs. Palse! Mrs. Palse!"

The Doctor was calling in a short, authoritative voice I had never heard from him, and Nana ran hastily in to him; she was behind the closed door before her voice had ceased to echo in our ears.

And now that troublesome moaning grew louder and more constant; it rose higher in gusts and sank lower into muttering, querulous pleadings with some one, to be let alone, let alone, let alone. Soon we heard words distinctly:

"No! no! not another step! I will not—go away!
Oh! Oh! Oh!"

The Professor began to walk nervously about and about the room on the little worn carpet path, and I, glancing uneasily at the wall, where the sounds came through, strode after him determinedly. Round and round we walked, as odd a pair of mortals, I dare say, as you would find in any one room in the Three Kingdoms, and still the misery endured in the room beyond the wall, and still the Professor turned the pages of the book he carried at the height of his nose.

And now the moaning ceased a moment and we were aware of a scurry of steps. Then suddenly the voice began to wail and sob in utter abandonment—the crying of a tired, hurt child: in some respects it was more painful than the groaning.

"This—this is frightful!" the Professor exclaimed hurriedly, and strode to the door Nana had closed so purposefully. He knocked, softly but decidedly, and in a moment Nana was holding it partly open and confronting us.

"Well, sir?" she inquired shortly, and I could see that

I INTRODUCE CHRISSY

we were terribly inopportune, the Professor and I, and wondered how he dared to accost Nana in her stronghold.

"This—this—all this—can nothing be done?" he besought her earnestly, searching her implacable face with his pale, disturbed eyes. "Surely the Doctor—there must be some anæsthetic—this is unreasonable . . ."

"Unreasonable or not, sir, it's got to be," said Nana coldly, "and if you mean chloroform, no sir, not yet. There's many worse and longer at it than your lady, sir. Be patient, now, and all will be forgotten by morning, I do assure you, sir. That's the way of it. It has to be."

"If I could only help——"

"Yes, sir, of course," said Nana, with a slight but unmistakable scorn; "that's what many feels, sir. But you can't. So why don't you just go away, sir? 'Tis not like other pain, and in the end there's something to show for it, as I always say. Just go off this floor, now, there's a good man!"

She had one ear turned from us and it was plain that not one of the heavy, whimpering breaths in the room escaped her.

"Come now, that's better—you're very good and brave."

I heard the Doctor's voice, as gentle—I will not say as a woman's, for no woman's voice could be so kind and yet so stern and strong as his floated out to us: I caught all that in it then, as I have so many times since—and Nana began to close the door against us.

"If you don't feel you could leave the house, sir, why, many gentlemen will always go to the cellar," she suggested, kindly but conclusively, "and that would be my advice, sir, at present. You may be sure all is right, sir."

THE INHERITANCE

And the latch clicked.

We found ourselves walking the little path again, and as he stopped suddenly and faced me (I had hold of the tails of his frock coat by now) I was brought to an equally sudden stop and collided violently with him.

“These sufferings,” he said abruptly, “differ from all others known to science, I understand, in that it is impossible to reconstruct them from memory. You have always understood this, have you not?”

“Y-yes, please, sir,” I answered tremulously: I could not possibly have replied otherwise.

“Very good. The curiously evanescent character—hark!”

A long wail of utter anguish struck across his dry voice, so that we both jumped and listened nervously, but it was not repeated.

“This proves their character to be distinctly physiological and not, strictly speaking, pathological at all,” he continued decisively; “you follow me?”

“Y-yes, please, sir,” I answered again, and suddenly a high, rending shriek rang through the house, another, and yet another.

“No! No!” the voice screamed, “I will not—I cannot! Christopher! Christopher! They’re killing me!”

“Great God, this is too much!” he exclaimed, and dashed out of the room and down the stairs, I clinging wildly to the tails of his coat and skipping through the air after him. But even as we passed the terrible door I could distinguish perfectly the hoarse, all but unhuman cries, Nana’s soothing murmurs (“There, there, dear—there, there, there!”) and the stern, quick orders of my wonderful Doctor.

Downstairs we flew, through the kitchen, where as in a dream I noted the younger mulatto woman gathering

I INTRODUCE CHRISSY

flannel hastily from her rack and the elder kneeling on the floor with clasped hands and wet cheeks, her lips moving steadily. Out of that house of anguish we fled as one flees in nightmares, he with hands clapped to his ears, I swinging and swaying in his wake, gripping the coat tails like grim death—a scare-crow couple, hag ridden by one dreadful, compelling necessity, to outrun those snarling, panting noises.

Across the yard we thundered, I in great, long, tiptoe strides that barely touched the earth, into the weather-beaten old barn, and up the slippery, treacherous, sagging steps to the loft, where we threw ourselves down with one accord and grovelled into the hay, burying our shamed heads in it, crowding it into our helpless, outraged ears. I heard what I had never heard before: a man's harsh, heavy sobs, and to them I joined my own small pipe and wept, till, forgetting what I wept for, I fell into a deep, exhausted sleep.

When I woke it was late afternoon and the sun was hard on his setting. I was hungry and confused and quite alone. In a vague way I recalled what had happened, but only vaguely, and plodded toward the house, bent on finding out from Nana what it had all been about and why we had run so fast.

The house, as I mounted the stair, was perfectly quiet, and perfectly quiet the room where Nana had mounted guard at noontime. I knocked gently, and receiving no answer, listened fearfully at the key hole. There, crouching down, I heard distinctly a gentle humming and recognized my nurse's voice, aye, even the old song she sang, a prime favourite of my own:

*"O the oak and the ash and the bonny ivy-tree,
They all grow together in the North Country!"*

THE INHERITANCE

sang Nana softly, and I, knowing that she was always in the best of spirits when she sang this song, turned the knob boldly and entered the room.

On the very threshold I stopped in amaze, for it was the same room, yet a different. All the stale *melee* of food and clothes and ink had vanished; the chairs stood empty and plump in fresh chintz covers; the big writing table had been dragged to one side and covered with a white cloth whereon lay piles of linen, flannel and what not, and a spirit lamp and tiny tea service; the fireplace was clean and swept empty and a great jug of cool green ferns (the people thereabouts called them "brakes") stood in it, like our sunflowers at home; there was no clothing in sight, and the bed fairly twinkled in crisp, snowy curtains and rufflings, while from a sea of white linen under its canopy, a dark head emerged.

A wholesome, pungent odour filled the room, and I knew it was that of a certain toilet vinegar which Nana compounded with herbs and spices and carried with her when she went out nursing; I was very fond of it. Nana herself sat in a low chair on the other side of the bed and in order to reach her I had to pass by the white bolster with the dark head on it.

"Is this the little boy?" a pleasant, low voice came from the pillows, and I could no more believe that the gentle, placid lady that lay there, pale and smiling kindly, was the crimson, staring creature I had seen there, than that this clean, quiet, sweet-smelling room was the feverish, cluttered place I had peered across a few hours ago.

"Come to Nana, deary—are you hungry? I'll warrant you are. Go softly down the stairs, lambie, and ask the black woman there in the kitchen to give you a bowl of that grand rich broth she was at when we came. Poor soul, she's made enough for the parish, all overwrought

I INTRODUCE CHRISSY

as she was! And you can crumb your bread in it—Don't you want to see the baby, deary, before you go? It's a lovely little girl, as fine and strong as can be—just a perfect child! Come and see the little darling!" A great red ray of the dropping sun struck across her chair and enveloped all that peaceful room with a rich glow. Cow bells jangled somewhere in the distance and the fresh muslin curtains swayed in the little sunset breeze. Nana's foot beat softly, rhythmically on the floor and she burst again into soft humming.

"O the oak and the ash and the bonny ivy-tree"—

I can close my eyes and see it now. . . .

Then I noticed that Nana held a flannel bundle in her arms as she swayed and crooned—held it with that wonderful passion of protecting curves which you may see alike in the gutter child cradling a dressed clothes-pin and Raphael's Sistine Mother embracing her treasure. Black and white, old and young, maid and wife, they turn the same eyes on you, just lifted from that curved arm; I think the glance has never changed since Eve first fed her eyes on Cain and then swept the world with a vision new-washed. So Nana looked at me, though the child she held was none of hers—nor, indeed, does it need to be, O ye army of faithful nurses, from whom many of us first learned that look of love and illumination. Rachels weeping for your children are ye all, one day or other, and they go away from you and grow beyond you, and you must hide your tears and offer your bruised heart at another and yet another cradle.

Nana pulled me nearer and I saw that in that careful bundle a tiny red and wrinkled face was hidden: a face immeasurably old, it seemed to me, yet very evidently soft and helpless, a breakable, crushable thing that put

THE INHERITANCE

one instantly upon one's honour to protect and defend it.

"Kiss her little hand, precious; she weighs eight pounds!" cried Nana jubilantly, yet in a sort of whisper —and thus it was that I was introduced to Chrissy!

CHAPTER VI

In Which I Take You to a Christening Party

IT is quite unreasonable, I know, but as a matter of fact I don't remember ever questioning the likelihood of Chrissy's name. And now as I write, the years and the shadows of them roll back as the stage curtains draw back and loop themselves at the side of the scene, and I see myself, a solemn little fellow of nearly seven, standing by the font in the little stone church and staring with all my eyes at the Professor, who held an unaccustomed prayer book close to his near-sighted eyes and endeavoured feebly to settle his green eye shade over his brow. This he could not do for the reason that it was not present on this occasion, Nana having removed it, just as he left the house, from its perilous perch above his straw sailor hat. Close by him stood Aunt Addie, who had readily accepted the office of god-mother, sharing this function with the rector's wife, a kind-hearted, almost totally deaf creature who never made any impression on anybody beyond that of always coming apart in back and having to be hooked up; I distinctly recall Aunt Addie's performing that helpful duty for her as she stood smiling, with that peculiar placid smile of the deaf, the sprawling baby in her arms. Nana stood respectfully in the background with a watchful eye on the Professor, whom she considered her special charge ever since their first meeting, ready to arrest him in case he should forget his whereabouts (and his why-

THE INHERITANCE

abouts, if I may coin the word) and leave before the conclusion of the ceremony. The Rev. Mr. Applegate was a cheery, ruddy, plump little fellow, who had preached his cheery, ruddy little sermons to a handful of the faithful and baptized the few babies they added to his flock and played whist with the president of the bank and dined once a week with the owner of the Banksville Hardware Works, for quarter of a century. His was not a populous nor a popular parish, and but for the disproportionately generous gifts from these two or three wealthy parishioners he would have been hard put to it to justify its existence at all.

Aunt Addie—who had in fifteen years of London residence become almost completely Anglicised and had honestly returned to her widowed brother from a sense of duty only, for she preferred England to America to the day of her death—was an ardent supporter of the Reverend Applegate, and spoke of and to him with a deep respect which must have been very pleasing to the little man. And as for Nana—well, I verily believe that to Nana and not at all to the subsequent legacies by which St. Matthews' profited and the two new Southern families that moved to South Warwick after the war, was due the rehabilitation of the little church and its gradual growth in importance. It is at present only a mission chapel in what is called the “old part” of the town: a gymnasium and a free bath and a reading room and domestic science laboratory mark sufficiently the status of the class to which it ministers, and a new St. Matthews', twice as large, with a vested choir and a famous boy soprano and stained-glass windows from Tiffany, stands at the end of the long, crowded avenue that leads to the old Vereker house, now a fresh-air retreat for city waifs. But in the 60's only three of War-

I TAKE YOU TO A CHRISTENING

wick's "first families" embraced what Aunt Addie called the Church, and the "decent poor bodies," in Nana's phrase, had long fallen away from one of the oldest parishes in the country when she valiantly mounted a ladder and scrubbed its dull windows, broomed the carpet with tea leaves, polished the old brasses and actually re-covered the pew cushions, in what she called her odd bits of time. I don't think she could have been six months in the town before a baker's dozen of shame-faced deserters to the eight or nine forms of "Dissent" that divided the spiritual allegiance of Warwick found themselves marshalled into the rear pews of St. Matthews', and standing sooner or later with their various offspring near the clumsy, stained marble font, Aunt Addie and the amazed Mrs. Applegate placidly renouncing the devil and all his works in their innocent offsprings' various behalves.

Aunt Addie was firmly convinced that she had led the prodigals thither and to the infant classes in catechism which she found herself conducting later, just as the wealthy Miss Fanny Banks undoubtedly supposed herself the originator of the Christmas tree, and the almost equally wealthy Mrs. Levi Bragg would have died at the stake defending her responsibility for the afterward famous quartette choir, which actually gave a concert at Easter and made eighty dollars, to say nothing of a notice in the New York paper. And when old Colonel Rogers died from his Antietam bullet, finally (its devious course through his anatomy was one of the horrid delights of Warwick infancy) it is quite probable that Miss Ellaline Rogers honestly believed the new-fashioned memorial pipe-organ to have been her own idea. At any rate she paid the organist's salary and bought all the music, and when Bert, nine or ten years later, had the organ, and doubled the quartette and gave a full English

THE INHERITANCE

choral communion service so well that city summer visitors filled the church and the offertory plate together, she and Bert divided the honours between them. And nobody dreamed that that good nurse of Dr. Caldwell's who is so delightfully respectful, my dear, and knows her place so well, had the remotest connection with the Mass in D Flat. Nor that her matter-of-fact suggestion that Master Bert should try his hand at the organ, to oblige, in the absence of Miss Rogers' man, was the foundation of the saving occupation that kept the poor, gifted lad out of mischief for a whole year. If Nana herself had any idea of the connection she was far too discreet a person to breathe it, and agreed quietly to all the praises of the energetic ladies whose interest and generosity had done so much to raise St. Matthews' to its proper place.

Well, we stood at the font (Nana had steadfastly refused to stand as god-mother, though Mrs. Vereker had requested her to, on the ground that her position was not suitable to such an office, though grateful for the honour, indeed, ma'am, and ever shall be), and Aunt Addie, even while deprecating her attitude, felt secretly relieved, any one could see.

"For as you can quite understand, Mrs. Applegate," she said to the rector's wife in the piercing tones required by that lady's deafness, so that I, who was building houses of bricks with Cary, at the time, in the adjacent dining-room, heard her plainly, "it really would be a little odd. Not even a foster mother, you see, as in Hughie's case, and after all, extraordinary as Mrs. Vereker may be, she was a St. Aubyn, you know, and it can't be gotten over. It would hardly be proper for a child's nurse, no matter how good the child's own family may be, to stand up for Major St. Aubyn's granddaughter."

I TAKE YOU TO A CHRISTENING

"I suppose not," said Mrs. Applegate.

"No. To say nothing of the Professor, who stands very well, I am told, by my friends in London. I wrote directly I found out about them, and Bishop Vereker was his great-uncle. His father afterward went over to Rome, I'm sorry to say. And yet with all that religion in the family, he never has entered a church since he was married! Fancy it!"

"Dear me," said Mrs. Applegate, "they are certainly very strange."

And they were strange. Even as a child of six I knew that they were strange. When I went up to the Verekers' with Nana to see how the lady was getting on, and was ushered upstairs into the book-filled bedroom to confront Mrs. Vereker nursing her infant with one hand, as it were, and writing with the other, an abstracted stare on her sweet, sallow face, a quill pen hovering over the big, untidy inkstand, I realized that such was not the custom of her sex in general. Even in that dingy London court that was never mentioned between Nana and me since we were quit of it, the busiest drudges devoted their entire attention for the moment to this maternal function. I had often seen them. Nor was she any more engrossed with her own nourishment, which was invariably carried to her desk on a tray; a large volume stood propped before her as she ate, and oftener than not the food grew cold and glazed while she turned the pages. During whole days after Chrissy's arrival she read lying flat in her bed, the younger mulattress kneeling beside her and holding the heavy book at a proper angle for hours together without a word or movement.

The knowledge that beyond the wall sat the Professor reading from *his* book propped in front of *his* tray affected me strongly: I used often to creep from one room

THE INHERITANCE

to the other in order to peer at them as they sat there image-like, utterly solitary, utterly content. The only difference in their methods of life was that the Professor took a regular constitutional between the barn and the house once a day, irrespective of every form of weather but heavy snow drifts, while his wife never was known to leave her room except to superintend the clearing out of the used books and the introduction of new into their places. At the time of my entry into Warwick they filled only the two living-floors: when we sold them, finally, the attic and the cellar were packed with them.

She was generally supposed, in later years, by the few who came to know her, to be excessively learned. I never knew if she were or not. Certainly nothing in her manner of conversation ever indicated it. The Doctor always insisted that she was a victim to bibliomania, and was addicted to print precisely as any of her fellow victims to drugs or alcohol. He told me years afterwards that he doubted if she could live a week if she should ever go blind.

The Professor was an Egyptologist, and usually supposed by his readers and fellow students to spend most of his time in close study of that country, which he had never viewed from any nearer point than the British Museum. But I have been told that he possessed a singular faculty for rehabilitating all that ancient life and picturing for his readers the most vivid conceptions of its various ethnological, geographical and historical changes. He certainly knew little enough of the country he had adopted. He had come from New York directly to Warwick, established himself, his books and his little household in the farmhouse left him by his uncle (who had taken the property for a debt and never seen it) and so

I TAKE YOU TO A CHRISTENING

far as anybody knew, never left it until he followed Nana meekly to his daughter's baptism.

"I think he knows the blessed lamb's not being promised for into any of that heathenry he's always mulling over—I give him that," Nana confided to me, "but more than that much—I'll warrant you, no!"

And to tell the truth I think the ritual of the *Book of the Dead*, whose great bird-headed gods were one of the terrors of my childhood, would have been vastly more familiar to Professor Vereker than the service he was now following.

The sun filtered through the painted glass presentment of a most unconvincing Moses, engaged, apparently, in a badly aimed attempt to bash the tribes out of existence with the Tables of the Law, and shining into Chrissy's eyes caused her to sneeze violently. Mrs. Applegate, who was sensitive, as the deaf always are, to vibration, jumped as the baby's convulsion startled her and threw herself backward toward the Professor. He, startled in his turn out of some Egyptian dream, caught his breath suddenly and woke to his surroundings just as the little rector, eying him somewhat sternly, said in his close-clipped, busy little way:

"Name this child."

The Professor stared helplessly at him, then, at Nana, but Nana, ordinarily ready for any emergency, was twitching with impatience at the baby's sneeze, vexed beyond bearing almost, at Mrs. Applegate's fecklessness in not standing out of the guilty ray of sunlight, and was for the moment quite off her guard.

"Name this child!" Mr. Applegate repeated, more crisply than ever, fixing his keen little grey eye upon the Professor.

THE INHERITANCE

Professor Vereker straightened himself unconsciously and stood like one of his own slim priests of Isis.

“Christopher Vane Vereker!” he pronounced, loud and clear, with a sort of thrill of family pride, I make no doubt, as the good old name rang out, and a dim sense of all the honest Verekers planted for generations around the Lincoln Fens, to whose numbers, depleted by centuries of malaria from those same miasmatic Fens, he had added a new recruit, a healthy suckling, a fresh reach into a future dark as the interior of any of his pyramids.

Mrs. Applegate smiled, Aunt Addie, who had sneezed sympathetically with the baby, and was still confused with the indignity of the explosion, heard only the last two names, and Nana, overcome with horror, had only time to clear her throat before Mr. Applegate continued briskly :

“Christopher Vane, I baptise thee in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. . . .”

The Professor was back in his dream again: so far as he was concerned Mr. Applegate might as well have baptised his daughter in the name of Ra and of Nu and of the Sacred Nile, I am quite certain. The latter trinity was certainly far more familiar to his mind than the former.

What passed through Aunt Addie’s scandalised mind no one was ever able to discover, so involved did she invariably become when enlarging upon this theme. It is probable that she was immediately engaged in schemes for changing the poor child’s sex to accord with a sacred rite, for long years of intimacy with Aunt Addie have accustomed me to the reading of her mental processes, and this was quite along her usual lines of ratiocination.

As for Nana, she frankly admitted afterward that her knees went together so that it took all she knew to keep

I TAKE YOU TO A CHRISTENING

them up, and aside from the irreverence of interrupting a church service and contradicting her rector, of which course she had grave doubts as to the validity, under any circumstances, she couldn't have done anything to save her life, not if it had been ever so.

As for Chrissy, she didn't care at all, naturally, and would have sneezed neither more nor less if she had been baptized Rameses or Pharaoh Meneptah.

As for me, I considered Christopher Vane Vereker to be a fine-sounding mouthful of a name, and felt that I had never known the Professor to look so grand as when he stood straight and shouted it out so loud.

Nana, for the only time in her life, so far as I know, deserted a cause and fled incontinently from the church, talking to herself and red as a turkey cock, and Aunt Addie, disgusted with her pusillanimity and too scared to better it, sailed angrily out after her, leaving the mulattress, Diana, who stood meekly outside in the vestibule, to bundle the outraged and recently endued Christian home.

Afterwards, when it all came out, and while the little rector was debating with Aunt Addie as to laying the matter before his bishop and Nana was swimming in apologies and trying to take the whole tragedy on her broad, accustomed shoulders, the Professor stopped all further discussion by remarking quietly that he was well enough satisfied with the name as it was, that he could not see that this particular combination of vowels and consonants was any the less desirable for being applied a little out of its ordinary course, and that he preferred to hear no more of it, as he could not possibly spare the time to upset another morning by going to the church again. Nobody ever learned Mrs. Vereker's opinion for the reason that she never gave it, nor am I at all sure that her attention

THE INHERITANCE

was ever sufficiently caught by the affair to warrant her forming any.

Nor do I ever expect to see the day when any name known to the calendar shall sound to me so loving and lovable, so friendly and honest, and all that there is of womanly, as Chrissy's!

CHAPTER VII

In Which I Begin My Education

A DAY or two ago the Powers that Be in my house gave warning that the study was to be turned out, and I was requested, in those gentle tones of forbearance that spell (to the initiated) instant submission and no quarter, to empty out my desk, and particularly those old drawers at the 'way back. Shrouded in the dense gloom that must inevitably characterise all such occasions (for what harm, I ask you, could be supposed to lurk in those innocent drawers at the 'way back?) I approached the task, and like many a devoted martyr before me, reaped an unexpected reward, for there tumbled out, thick with dust and creased to the breaking point, a half score old manila envelopes, and from them I drew out, as a woman draws out old garments scented with the attar of roses of half a lifetime, such quaint old records of a childish past as I had supposed long forgotten, beyond any power of yellowed papers and tarnished metal to recall.

And lo, it was not forgotten, nor vanished, nor dead, but vivid and living with me, and touching beyond any power of mine to bring before you. The years between rolled back like the smoke of my pipe, that went out unheeded between my teeth, as I turned over those hints and scraps of yesterday, and that foolish concession we call Time flew out of the study window with the blue smoke rings.

Monthly Report of Hughie Gordon, Scholarship, De-

THE INHERITANCE

portment and Morals, was written in a crabbed, pains-taking hand on the outside of a thin and obviously home-made pamphlet, basted neatly together out of thin, glazed wrapping paper. It was signed *Hetty Lavinia Parrott*, and as I read it I was six years old again, and trotting along with Bert and Cary to old Mrs. Parrott's Private School for Young Children of Both Sexes. There were no kindergartens then, and no one had discovered the inestimable value of modelling clay and twisted tissue paper in the development of infancy. So we carried a red-bound slate, a First Reader, conservatively covered with chocolate-coloured muslin, and a substantial luncheon basket with a fringed red napkin dribbling out below the cover. These three articles were considered to occupy quite sufficiently our hands, our brains and our stomachs, and so far as I can remember this simple faith was quite justified.

Old Mrs. Parrott! I say old, for old she appeared to us then; I suppose she was no more middle aged than the possession of two grown daughters would warrant. She was plump and brown and altogether robin-like, with kindly, twinkling eyes and a strong sense of order and despatch: it never occurred to me to doubt for a moment that she was called Parrott because of the cross-grained pink-and-grey bird that swung in a (necessarily) strong iron cage under a cherry tree in summer weather and in the south window of the dining-room in winter. We went to school in the dining-room, that always smelled comfortingly of coffee and buttered rusk, and we began the exercises of the day in the following manner.

“Bibles, Hughie!” Mrs. Parrott would chirrup to me, and I would bring, two by two, puffing and blowing, for they were very heavy, armfuls of large, yellow calf-bound Bibles. In spite of their size (and they were like small

I BEGIN MY EDUCATION

dictionaries) their print was not particularly coarse, for we had no fine India paper, limp-leaved, map-filled *de luxe* Bibles in those days, and we bent over them and traced the words with our fingers, painfully—in poor Cary's case, tearfully,—in all our cases, with an absolute lack of appreciation of what we were reading about. After I had slammed the books down in front of each of the half dozen or so students (and it is a triumph to Mrs. Parrott's character and system that I was deeply sensible of the honour of this position of Bible bringer, though as a matter of fact it tired me and I often pinched my finger between the table and Carroll Lee's Bible, which was the biggest and heaviest) we opened them with a vast deal of shuffling and swishing of leaves and any amount of assistance from Mrs. Parrott, and intoned each a verse of one of the Psalms, turn about.

"Lift-up-your-heads-O-ye-gates-and-the-King-of-glory-shall-come-in."

"Very good, very good, Fanny. Now, Bert!"

"Who - is-this-King-of-glory? The-Lord-strong-and-mish-ty-the-Lord—"

(“Mighty, Bert, mighty.”)

"Mi-tey-the-Lord-mish-ty—"

(“Mighty!”)

"Mi-tey-in-bat-tle?"

"Drop your voice, Bert. That is a full stop."

"Oh—bat-tle!"

"There, there, Bert! More control, more control! Now, Cary, dear, and remember not to read out the 'Selah'."

(“I dare you to read it, Cary!”)

"Hush, Bert, hush! Now, Cary! Don't be frightened; there's a good boy! And take your thumb out. And don't say 'Selah,' will you?"

THE INHERITANCE

But poor Cary *was* frightened, and *didn't* take his thumb out—and *did* read “Selah” after all!

Here is a small printed paper, much folded, that turns out to be a blotted piano score, copied in violet ink, with the rests much too big in proportion for the eighths and quarters. *The Carnival of Venice* is printed at the top, and those four words alone seem positively to fill my nostrils with a scent that surely was never compounded in my study. But I sniff again and again, and actually draw in breaths of Miss Susy Farwell’s parlour, where once a week I took my music lesson, sandwiched between Bert and Cary, who preceded and followed me respectively. Miss Susy’s parlour was small and dim and full of all manner of things much more interesting than the old square piano: her hallway smelled of seed cookies and oilcloth, but the parlour had a vanilla bean in it, somewhere, and a stuffed pheasant, always called Walter by us, for some reason I have forgotten, and Walter was not what he had been, and was always in moulted season. There was a charming engraving of a little bare-footed girl starting off for the beach with her pail and shovel, called “Going to Work,” and a “what-not” fitted into the corner, with diminishing triangular shelves loaded with shells and small, carved wooden animals and the Lord’s Prayer on ivory, very tiny, to be looked at under a magnifying glass, and a bunch of wax flowers under a glass bell, that added to the curious mixture of odours the *Carnival of Venice* spells for me.

Miss Susy had knotted, wrinkled fingers, and the yellow, tinkling keys of her old piano (she called it a piano-forte) clicked strangely when one pounded out the *Carnival*. The green shutters were always closely drawn, and a sort of filtered, yellow light lay over everything and left the corners dusky and mysterious. It seems to

I BEGIN MY EDUCATION

have been always very warm when I took my lessons, for I recall Miss Susy as always in a loose, white sacque, waving a palm leaf fan and wiping her brownish forehead. As always, in our trio, I did passably well and gave comparatively little trouble, Bert did very well and gave a great deal, and Cary sucked his thumb and cried and had to be pacified with seed cakes. I was supposed to practice half an hour a day on the Doctor's piano, and as the half hour selected for me came directly after the middle-day dinner, and I invariably played all the afternoon there, it was the most natural thing in the world for me to have dinner with them, three days out of four, especially when the Doctor had set Nana on some nursing case and there would be no one to look after me at our cottage. As a matter of fact, there were weeks on end when I lived there, and "Master Hughie's room" had always been kept ready for me since our first visit.

When my London clothes wore out, Aunt Addie herself suggested getting mine made with the others, while the woman was at it—for a gnarly, bad-tempered little tailoress still made boys' clothes at that date in South Warwick—and I well remember Nana's unconcealable surprise when Miss Tucker sat down to the table with us. She herself, at the Doctor's suggestion, ate in the dining-room after we had finished, in order to establish some kind of precedent to be followed by her other patrons, for I do not believe that there was such a thing as a servants' dining-room in the community. (Nana still absentmindedly asked Aunt Addie, "and the corned beef for the 'hall,' Miss Caldwell, I suppose?" in catering for us, though no human being but Aunt Addie knew that she meant the servants' hall.) She was, as a matter of course, except in those establishments that "sent up a tray," expected to eat with the family, but stead-

THE INHERITANCE

fastly refused to do this, and so the Doctor's plan was evolved as a decent compromise.

"I've set the sempstress's place with mine, Miss Caldwell," she announced, on the first day of Miss Tucker's semi-annual visitation, and I can see the drop of her honest jaw now at Aunt Addie's unrestrained horror.

"Gracious, Mrs. Palse, put her with the rest of us, or she'll walk out of the door without opening her scissors!" cried Aunt Addie. "She's proud as Lucifer, and we'd never get her again—she *always* eats with the family!"

Nana never could grasp the curious social distinctions of the States, and on this occasion, I remember, poured out her feelings to me, as she tidied me for dinner.

"It's not as if she was one to make her call in the drawing-room with the ladies, regular-like—would I say a word, then? But slinking in at the side entry, and her bonnet and shawl on the pegs for your school clothes, and her bundle under her arm! How was I to know, I ask you? And her own sister cashier at the draper's—my word, but I'm sorry for Miss Caldwell, and her used to a sensible country! Let me know where I stand, is all I ask. There, now, Master Hugh, you're all tidied, and mind, now, none of that horrid ice in your water. I'll not have *your* vitals chilled out of you. The Doctor'll get his mutton underdone, for once, tell him from me, if you're sitting next him. I cooked it myself. This stewing good mutton to a dishclout is more than I can bear."

Dear, dear, how long ago it was!

"It's only the Doctor's boys," people would call to each other, as we raced through their "backyards," hooting and screeching, for Rob and Hux were at the noisy age and very healthy. Nana dreaded these trips, through

I BEGIN MY EDUCATION

the noon heats, and would always put up packets of luncheon for us, urging us to lie in the shade and eat slowly; such delectable luncheon packets! I can taste her sandwiches now, of cold mutton, liberally sprinkled with celery salt, for which condiment I had a passionate preference, and certain little tarts or "turnovers," as they were called, made of dried apples flavoured with lemon peel and kept, moist and flaky, in a cool stone crock. Hux was a bit of a gourmand, in his quiet, heavy way, and most of his allowance went for root beer, sold at a little notion and newspaper shop near us, a certain kind of cough-candy flavoured with anise, to which he was much addicted, and the nuts which I learned at that period to call "English walnuts." These dainties he would add to the luncheons, and there was a definite though not codified understanding that we were not to accept his hospitality too liberally. Whenever I dine at his house now and enjoy his jellied consommé, his soft crabs and his especial Burgundy (a trifle beyond a strictly proportionate adjustment of the income of even the vice-president of the bank, Mrs. Robert thinks) I recall with a chuckle those picnic luncheons at Millpond swimming hole, and I can't see that old Hux has changed very much.

Which parent did they resemble? Certainly not the Doctor, unless Rob's cool detachment came from him. But Bert was not a bit like his father, and it is inconceivable that a mother unable to impress herself on anybody's memory could have given that poor, unhappy, gifted fellow the brilliant capacities he was so little able to balance. As for poor little Cary, he was like any other naturally sweet-tempered child whom a chronic weakness frets and disables. Had I the care of the boy now I should know that I was treating that dread foe of fam-

THE INHERITANCE

ilies, infantile paralysis, and in the light of my present experience should wonder that the poor little fellow dragged his limping leg about for as many years as he did. But in the late sixties we knew less of the treatment of children than we know to-day. God sent them and God took them, our patients said. I can't but feel that those who scold so portentously because our present-day parents seem inclined to doubt the first proposition, forget that we have taught them to doubt equally the last, thereby reducing enormously the infantile death rate!

So Cary had his "bad days" and his "good days," and we dragged him in his little cart through the one and walked slowly, to allow him to keep up, through the other; and because he longed for the fresh air all the time and lived in it all day, and because Nana supervised his food more or less and kept him as much as she could on porridge and fresh eggs and vegetables, we doubled, I believe now, his short span of life.

He even took his turn at the public school with us, when, at about eight, I fancy, Mrs. Parrott's system proved scarcely strenuous enough, and we three younger ones followed Rob and Hux into old "Number Six," where Miss Emily Washburn, fat and friendly, but possessed of an almost superhuman knowledge of the human heart, took us, our marbles, our smudgy slates and our "McGuffey's Readers" in hand. In the light of the unspeakably filthy rags with which we sedulously cleaned those grimy slates, applying them to our mouths when the doubtful water went dry in our bottles (officially employed to the exclusion of nature's method), I am inclined to suspect the entire validity of the germ theory. Virchow and Pasteur would have lacked many of their present students had those germs been quite so black as they are painted nowadays!

I BEGIN MY EDUCATION

The public school (or schools, for there are at least five of them now) was a very different affair in those days. I doubt if Miss Emily Washburn had ever studied psychology in any other textbooks than those provided for her by her Maker, and I am certain that she knew nothing of folk-dancing, brass pounding, nature study, basketry or cabinet making; and yet, with all these disadvantages, Miss Emily, strange as it may seem, was really a good teacher. True, she did not deal with the miscellaneous mass of humanity that I survey when, in my capacity of inspector, I sit solemnly on the platform of the new "Number Six." There was not an Italian child in our school, not a Pole, not a Slav nor Hungarian, nor even, I believe, a Russian Jew. Such few of the Chosen People as were among us had scarcely a trace of foreign accent, and used the same idioms as we did. The curious jargon which began to be exploited as theirs, on the stage in the eighties and in fiction a decade later, was unheard of among us, and Abey Fox was only noticeable for being cleverer than the rest of us, and for the disqualifying fact that his father owned a liquor saloon. Miss Emily, who was a strict Methodist and who failed to teach folk-dancing for quite other reasons than her ignorance of the art, had persuaded Abey into "signing the pledge" early in his career, and had high hopes of his razing the saloon to the ground at such time as he should succeed to the paternal property. She often talked to us of the great day when all that beer and rum and wine should pour down the gutters of Main street, and we looked forward to it eagerly; I am not sure that I must not date a certain creeping, insidious maturity to my first suspicions that Abey would never do this, and that *Fox and Son* would probably replace the gilded *A. Fox* that now adorned the entrance to Miss Emily's pet Inferno.

THE INHERITANCE

No, those of us who were not of English stock were of Irish, in those days, with here and there a friendly blond German; and a paternal government was not obliged to wash us, nor to examine our teeth and our hair, nor to teach us to tell the truth and tell it in the Queen's English, nor to barricade our teachers from the onslaughts of infuriated South European maternity, while we were being vaccinated by the board of health. All these things were attended to at home, and Miss Emily came to tea with our mothers and boarded with our aunts and was assistant superintendent of the Sunday school under our uncles.

Heavens, how we spelled and parsed and spelled again! By the time we had parsed through "The curfew tolls the knell of parting day," under Miss Etta Marvin, as tall and acid as Miss Emily had been plump and jolly, and come to Milton's *Paradise Lost*, as we always called it, under Miss Lida Pierson, who had studied at Mt. Holyoke Seminary and knew Latin, I believe we could have spelled anything in reason in the English language. Bert was a famous speller, and on Friday afternoons, when we chose sides and had matches, I was proud to stand beside him and win the day with him against Fanny Pratt and her embattled Amazons.

We must have been about twelve, then, and Rob and Hux two or three years older. They were a dictatorial, managing pair, and didn't get on very well with their school equals, so they were better satisfied to lead a troop of younger lads, whom they drilled and disciplined in comparative peace. This confined them to our immediate neighbourhood, which was sparsely settled then, and resulted in a somewhat curious social situation, which would have continued indefinitely, I am convinced, had

I BEGIN MY EDUCATION

it not been suddenly and completely altered, in the following manner.

On the evening of my twelfth birthday, which had been marked by a picnic and swim at the beach, to which Nana had brought little Chrissy Vereker, as she had never seen salt water, and Bert and I had fought for the pleasure of teaching her to swim, so that his nose bled all over my bathing suit—on this evening I was led by Nana, both of us in our best and rather stiff, accordingly, to the Doctor's office, by previous appointment, evidently, as he was alone, free, and distinctly interested.

"Well, Mrs. Palse?" he said, motioning Nana to a chair, which to my surprise she took, for she never sat before him.

"Yes, sir, thank you, and I will, with all respect, for I'm a little worried in my mind, Doctor, and that always goes to my legs, if I may say so," she began. "It's about Master Hugh I'm come, Doctor."

"What? No mischief, surely?" and he looked searchingly at me. If any one had told him that he definitely regarded himself as my guardian by now, and would have held himself responsible for any serious breach of mine as much as in the case of any of the boys, he might have denied it, but I am not sure it would not have been true.

"Oh, no, sir," with a thankful pat for me, "Hughie's always been all I could wish, Doctor. It's not that. But I'm not entirely satisfied with his schooling, sir, and that's the truth."

"No? Why, what's wrong? Reports bad?"

"Oh, no, sir. But Master Hugh is twelve years of age, Dr. Caldwell, and I can't think it's right as he should be under the women so much. It don't seem natural to me, somehow. Surely, when he goes to the university, it

THE INHERITANCE

won't be women, Doctor? And oughtn't he to be doing Latin and Greek? He seems to study no languages at all, and all will be to do when he's older."

"I see," said the Doctor, and looked at me curiously, then at her.

"You want him brought up like the English lads, then?"

"I'm not saying that, Doctor, but it don't seem right to me that a young gentleman should know no more than the butcher's girls that he's at school with!"

"Come, come, Mrs. Palse, this is a free country you've come to, you know! We're each as good as his neighbour!"

"Yes, sir, but—but—there's other schools to be had, aren't there, Doctor?"

"Why, certainly. You don't think that what's good enough for my boys is good enough for Hugh, then?"

"I don't say that, sir."

"Perhaps you think the public school is *not* good enough for the boys?"

Nana creased her black skirt silently for a moment, then spoke suddenly:

"Doctor, who are Master Rob's and Master Huxley's friends?"

"Who? Who?" he repeated, staring at her. "Why, the boys of the neighbourhood, I suppose. Aren't they decent, respectable lads enough? I don't know them by name . . . I'm very busy . . ."

"I know it, Dr. Caldwell, and that's why I make bold to speak, for, of course, Miss Caldwell is poorly, and can't be expected to know such things. But it don't seem right to me that the young gentlemen should never be amongst those of their own age, sir, and always bullying the sort of little fellows that's around here. I've naught against the O'Shaugnessy woman nor the fishmonger's

I BEGIN MY EDUCATION

twins near the pond nor the livery stable children over beyond our pasture, Doctor, but I can't see that it's so free-and-equal, when Master Rob lords it over them so. They're gentlefolk, sir, and the others are not, put it how you may, and I don't like the words Master Bert picks up from those livery stable boys, and neither would you, sir. And unless you disapprove, Doctor, I'd wish to put Master Hugh to the academy on the hill."

"Dr. Crane's, you mean?"

"Yes, sir."

"Hugh can afford it, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes, sir."

"Use your own judgment, of course," he said shortly, and whirled about in his chair, and we sat in silence, uncomfortably.

Presently, however, he whirled back again and held out his hand.

"You're right, perhaps, Mrs. Palse," he said in his old voice, "and I suppose I've been negligent. If their mother had lived. . . ."

"I know, sir, I know!"

"I haven't a moment, myself, and so long as they were healthy and honest. . . ."

"Yes, sir, of course. And I know 'tis different over here. But there's forty boys in the academy, Doctor, and—and—"

"And they're Americans, too, you mean, and I can afford it?"

"Yes, sir, just so, sir, if you thought best."

"Of course, you know, I don't admit that our public schools—"'

"No, indeed, sir, and when they were younger it was different, of course. But for young lads of fifteen to be under a woman—I can't make it seem right, Doctor."

THE INHERITANCE

"I always meant to have some one, perhaps Dr. Applegate, get the older boys ready for college—I didn't realize they were growing so . . ." he said, half to himself.

"No, sir, I thought not. And Master Bert—not that he's not good at heart, but he'll be needing a strong hand, Doctor, you'll find, before long. That Miss Person's no match for him, I can tell you. He's by far too much around the stable, sir, for a young gentleman, and I doubt you know the words he'll let out when he's angry. It's not to be expected that Miss Caldwell——"

"No, no, of course not. I'll see Dr. Crane to-morrow."

"Thank you, sir. And if clothes are to be provided any ways different, Doctor——"

"Oh, Miss Caldwell will get them all together," he said carelessly. "How do you feel about this, Hugh? Should you like to desert Bert and Cary and go off to be an aristocrat on the hill, eh?"

"Oh, no, please not!" I cried; "send them, too, Doctor, and then we can play ball! Our nine sent a challenge to the Crane middle-size fellows, and they said they didn't play with Publics."

"Poppy-cock!" he exploded furiously, but he reddened, and we saw it.

He called on Dr. Crane the next afternoon, and we, in our best and quite astounded at the suddenness of all this, went too, Cary and I with him in the stanhope, and the other three driven by Thomas and the pair in the surrey. As we all got out, we had the satisfaction of hearing envious comments on the parts of the proud wearers of the uniform of the Crane Academy ball nine, and knew they were deserved, for whatever might be Dr. Caldwell's laxities of establishment, they were not in the matter of horse flesh.

Dr. Crane was delighted to see us, and said so frankly.

I BEGIN MY EDUCATION

"A fine showing, Caldwell, a fine showing!" he said warmly. "I have long felt that you owed me these boys, you know!"

And we knew that this pleased the Doctor.

A long consultation between Aunt Addie and Nana, who had nursed in many houses on the hill, filled the morning that we spent in getting our books from the desks that already seemed less desirable to us, and the next day we went in a body to New York and were fitted out, top to toe, with the approved wardrobe of Crane's Academy, Rob and Hux in their first long trousers. We dined at a restaurant famous for its sea food and ate great dishes of French ice cream, and Aunt Addie, who was delighted with the change she had long wanted to make and never been able to achieve, gave us each a five dollar bill for a commemorative present. We spent it, I recall, most characteristically: Rob reserving all but the price of a bat and ball for his bank, Hux succumbing to crystallized ginger, *chocolat menier* and a book of Scotch ballads, Bert going to the theatre by himself, Cary undecided as to his purchases and fractious from the uncertainty, I wishing to take Nana to Eden Musée, so as to remind her of Madame Tussaud's wax-works in London, which she had often described to me.

When we marshalled, defiant in our new clothes, in Dr. Crane's library, and he brought in assorted boys to meet us, we were not surprised to hear ourselves described as "Dr. Caldwell's five boys, young gentlemen, whom I am sure you will be delighted to welcome among you. Robert, Huxley, Albert, Cary and Hugh Caldwell. Shake hands, boys."

"I'm—I'm Hugh Gordon, sir," I faltered, horrified at such prominence among so many strangers.

THE INHERITANCE

"Ah! I had understood that you were one of the Doctor's household," said Dr. Crane doubtfully.

"He is. He lives with us—mostly," Hux explained bluntly.

"He's English, really," Bert added; "father's—his—"

"Oh, I see; your father is his guardian. Ah, yes, I understood some time ago that Miss Adeline Caldwell was interested . . . ah, yes," the doctor boomed cheerfully on. "Yes, yes. Well, we are all brothers together here, young gentlemen," and we shook hands sheepishly and went out to the morning recess.

The day after we had solemnly burned all our schoolbooks used in any other institution (a sacred rite peculiar to Crane Academy; the magnificent and unusual blaze resulting from some thirty volumes gave us a fine start-off!) and installed each our new set in our private, varnished, hinged-top desks—such a contrast to the nicked, worn, double-seated affairs of the "Public," we were as far in spirit from the dingy old brick building on West Main Street as the very baseball captain himself, who had been at Crane's since he was eight.

What with Rob's and Huxley's long trousers and the awe-inspiring school caps of us little ones, we seemed, undoubtedly, to the fish-monger's twins, *et al.*, like beings ravished away into another sphere, and we literally never played with them again, to the best of my memory.

When I recall that up to this time we had literally no intimate acquaintance among what may fairly be called our own class in South Warwick (though the Doctor was known everywhere and Aunt Addie made and received many languid, yearly calls of ceremony), and when I add that Rob married the sister of an intimate classmate at Crane's, that Hux went into the bank through the father of his best friend there, that Bert was at one time beyond

I BEGIN MY EDUCATION

a doubt the most popular young man of his age in the town, on the hill and off, and that my whole life was greatly shaped by my having been with them there—you won't wonder that I consider Nana's conversation with the Doctor that evening to have been more than common interesting!

CHAPTER VIII

In Which You May Renew Your Acquaintance with Chrissy

WHEN Chrissy (as she often did, in later life, I fear) shocked the ladies of South Warwick, I am told they would look meaningfully at one another and say, "But what could you expect, my dear, brought up as she was?"

As a matter of fact, Chrissy never was "brought" up; she came up of her own accord. There was no one to "bring" her, to begin with. Certainly no human being in his or her senses could have supposed Mrs. Vereker capable of bringing anybody or anything up or down. The Professor, indeed, became obsessed from time to time by various educational nightmares, which Nana, who made a point of dropping in on that curious household at more or less regular intervals, described with various degrees of horror to Aunt Addie.

The first two years of the child's life were passed in a large clothes hamper. She was a big, strong infant, Nana says, as placid and healthy as if she had derived her sustenance from what Mr. Micawber would have called the maternal font of an active milkmaid, braced with air and dew and hearty labour in the open. "By contrary," as Nana used to say, "that Mrs. Vereker never moves from one fortnight to the next, and as for the messes those yellow women stew up for her, how they ever made Christian milk for ten months is more than I or any other sensible body can see!"

YOU RENEW ACQUAINTANCE

It was at Nana's suggestion that the clothes hamper was procured, and for a year the baby lay cooing there, dragged into the shade or the sun, as the season demanded, by the younger mulatto woman, who bathed and dressed her. The marvel of her tiny wardrobe I myself remember, for Nana never tired of showing it to me, in default of any worthier admirer, during the weeks that she stayed with the Verekers at Chrissy's advent.

"See, lambie, see that little barrow coat," she would murmur in awed tones, "and look at the sheaves of wheat stand up on the flannel—it's a crime to use them so common, they're fit for a royal princess!"

I gazed with interest, aware only that the filmy white stuff that wrapped the baby was far thinner and more fragile than the material of which my own clothes were composed, that each little garment was frosted and flowered and frescoed with fine needlework in the most charming and interesting designs—I called them "pictures on the frocks," and sometimes asked to see any fresh ones that might be forthcoming. There was one that particularly pleased me, of convolvulus and feathery ferns, each frond distinct and like some lovely, delicate bas-relief, and it was in this, at my request, that the baby was christened.

"They're all from the West Indies, lovey, where the blacks are and the sugar canes and such," Nana informed me. "There's no such work done in these parts, I'll warrant you."

Aunt Addie and Mrs. Applegate hung enraptured over the lacy things and took endless patterns of them, and as fast as they were outgrown Nana wrapped them carefully in dark blue tissue paper, sprinkled bits of white wax amongst them, "against they yellow, with lying idle," and

THE INHERITANCE

put them away with twists of lavender from her own garden in a carved cedar chest from which she contemptuously turned out the inevitable volumes.

It lasted, this royal layette, for just a year, and for just a year, too, the clothes hamper proved sufficient for Chrissy's growing bulk, but when she deliberately upset it one day and adventured forth on hands and knees, to be found crawling in the road by the scandalized butcher, even Diana felt that something must be done, and approached the Professor on the subject. He gave the matter prolonged consideration, then suggested that a larger hamper be ordered from the village. This being done, and the answer forthcoming that hampers "didn't come any larger," the Professor cogitated still more profoundly, then caused a carpenter to be summoned. This worthy, asked if he could make a basket similar in all proportions to the one before him, but larger, agreed that he could manage the frame, and the gypsies over by the pond could doubtless, if it were made worth their while, plait the basket. Orders were accordingly given to this effect, and when Nana and I came on our next visit we beheld the surprised and baffled infant literally roaming about in a mammoth contrivance which had the curious effect of making all other furniture seem out of proportion, whereat we stood rooted to the ground with amazement.

"Bless the man!" Nana cried, on hearing the history of this prodigious basket, "but why did it have to be just like the other, then? A great box would have answered, padded thorough, and far less trouble."

"I supposed from your insistence on the first, that the shape and material were best suited to the child's needs at this period," the Professor explained.

"But surely, sir," Nana ventured respectfully, "you

YOU RENEW ACQUAINTANCE

could see that there's naught in a basket, to say basket, that can help the child."

The Professor waved his hand vaguely.

"These matters are hardly within my province," he said. "I trust you do not regard the hamper as harmful in any way?"

"Oh, no, no, sir," she assured him, "not the least. And very generous in you, I'm sure, for it must have been a heavy expense. You meant well, I'm sure, sir!"

The Professor was gratified and returned to ancient Egypt with a sigh of relief.

I saw Chrissy only once when she was three: she was staggering about, leaning on a huge bloodhound puppy, the gift of an English major, I learned, who had journeyed up from Bermuda, where he was stationed, to visit her mother. He had but an hour or so to spare, and Nana, learning of his impending arrival, by some mysterious wireless telegraphy beside which Signor Marconi's invention is but a slow and mushroom affair, had hustled over to see if she could not be helpful in preparing some sort of conventional meal, "for the poor bodies have eaten messes off trays so long, and the dining-room full of books and all," quoth Nana.

But when we got there we saw that all our sympathy was wasted. There in the shade of a great sugar maple on the lawn at the east side of the old house, we saw a white-spread table glittering with silver and quaint, thick cut-glass dishes, a large *epergne* in the centre filled with fragrant, dewy pond-lilies. I saw dark liquids in pot-bellied decanters and squat glass dishes with ginger in syrup and dried fruits heaped on a basket-work silver platter. There were little groups of slender, small glasses at each of the three plates, an arrangement I had never seen before, and on a sort of tray on legs, nuts,

THE INHERITANCE

sweet biscuits, ripe peaches and a tinier decanter waited.

We entered modestly from the back, and found the silent, yellow cook in a most unwonted bustle, her stove overflowing, her languor and sulks all gone. Diana, we learned, was dressing her mistress, and was not required to wait at table, as the Major's body-servant would attend to that.

Nana, frankly curious, and excited in spite of herself, inspected the courses as they went out, and I poked an inquiring nose toward each savoury dish as Diana handed it to the stiff but appreciative orderly: chilled cantaloupes (muskmelons, we boys called them); a rich broth of clams, with nutmeg atop; a massive lobster in a nest of shredded cabbage and lettuces; quarters of young chicken cased in batter and smothered in mushrooms (Warwickians at that period regarded this vegetable growth as but doubtfully wholesome) and a pyramid of tinted jellies, quivering and odorous. Major Protheroe, bronzed and spare, sat at one side of the polished mahogany table, the Professor, positively distinguished in a yellowish linen suit, with a new necktie and polished shoes, sat opposite, and between them a lady whom I did not at first recognise laughed and chatted pleasantly.

"A body'd never know her," Nana whispered, and then I realized that it was Mrs. Vereker. She had on a worked muslin frock and a pale blue sash with long floating ends about her waist; her dark shadowy hair was rolled out on each side of her face and drawn high on her head with a big, carved ivory comb behind. About her neck a deep red carbuncle hung on a carved gold chain, and she had earrings of the same in her small ears. There was not a book nor review nor so much as a pamphlet anywhere about, and her vivacity and animation were surprising. Chrissy, leaning over the deep-jowled hound's neck, tod-

YOU RENEW ACQUAINTANCE

dled about the grass, and with her, too, miracles had been achieved. Her hair, at that time light, had been coaxed into curls, and a rose-coloured band tied among them; "the yellow woman ran up that little frock out of an old petticoat of madam's," Nana muttered, "and I took note of the pink sash and the embroidered socks in a drawer once."

Irresistibly fascinated, I hung about the group; the charming al fresco effect of it (so unusual, in fact, so unknown in Warwick) was like a stage scene to me. Not so, however, to Nana. She, too, gravitated towards the picture unconsciously.

"For all the world like gentlefolk taking their tea at home," she said softly.

"How are you, laddie?" the Major inquired kindly, sipping his coffee luxuriously.

"Come here, Hughie," Mrs. Vereker called, "this is little Hugh, Major, a protégé of the good doctor I was telling you about. A little English boy."

"English? What's he here for?" asked the Major bluntly.

"Why—er—why is he, Christopher?" she said, the earrings swaying as she turned; "I never knew exactly, did I? Some inheritance business I suppose—under a will, or something of that sort—wasn't that the idea we got from Miss Caldwell? His nurse is here, I think . . ."

But Nana had slipped back behind the cedar shrubbery, and I had no idea what I *was* here for, so I couldn't help.

"Undoubtedly, undoubtedly," the Professor agreed wisely, and the Major added:

"Oh, of course, if it's *property* . . ." and everybody seemed satisfied.

I was in the last of my London clothes, a sailor suit of

THE INHERITANCE

white drilling, too small for me, but treasured by Nana because of the intense midsummer heats, and as Chrissy and I hung over the patient puppy and a little breeze scattered the scent of the pond lilies, the Major glanced contentedly over the scene—a natural enough one to him—and sighed.

"It's quite like being at home, Vereker, isn't it?" he said; "they told me I should find America so different."

"Oh, no," said the Professor, "dear me, no. Very much the same, I should say."

"Why should it be different?" Mrs. Vereker queried innocently. I heard a gasp behind the cedar shrubbery, and I knew now why Nana lost control of herself to that extent: a scene—and people—more unlike the South Warwick of that day would have been difficult to find in that vicinity. Not a person there but the Major was in his or her usual course, nothing that they did or said seemed real or possible to any of the spectators. As to the Verekers, who can tell which was their real life—this hasty scene, set, staged and (it seemed to Chrissy and me) acted for a few hours, or that pale, solitary existence to which they returned, directly he left, as easily as they had left it! Chrissy remembers the rose-coloured sash and fillet well, and the sugared wine-and-water and nuts and candied ginger we were fed by the indulgent Major, who was, like many bachelors, devoted to children.

"Are there many balls about here, now?" he asked idly; "do you remember how we danced till morning on the old *Ætna*?"

This could not but catch my ear, for I knew from Mrs. Parrott that there were abandoned parents on the hill who sent their children to dancing masters precisely in order to set them on this broad road leading to destruction. But I connected the diversion with childhood ex-

YOU RENEW ACQUAINTANCE

clusively, and the idea of elderly ladies (as Mrs. Vereker appeared to me to be) as having been at any time in the memory of man engaged in such performances seemed fantastic to a degree.

Much later, when I saw a picture of her in ball costume with a wreath of gardenias on her dark head and a bracelet (it had a lock of the Major's hair in it) on her arm, I was able to realize that she was but five and twenty at the time and consequently not more than thirty, at most, when the Major recalled those nights on the deck of the old *Ætna*.

"Are there many balls, Christopher?" she asked indifferently, and the Professor looked vague and said politely:

"My interests, Eugenie, are not such as to keep me *au courant* with the local pleasures of that sort, but I have no doubt that there are the usual number!"

"Humph!" breathed Nana.

"Much hunting?" the Major queried negligently; "it looked good hunting country from the coach."

At this point I hastened to assist the conversation.

"They hunted a fox up on Bragg's Hill," I piped up; "some big boys shot him."

"Pooh, pooh!" the Major chided; "s-sh, s-sh, my man! Foxes aren't shot, you know! Mustn't go wrong there."

"But this fox——" I went on instructively, and ceased abruptly, for I caught Nana's eye, glowering from the shrubbery.

"Speaking of inheritance, and property, and that sort of thing," the Major said, jerkily, as he always spoke, "Stacey's got the title, you know."

"Really?" Mrs. Vereker cried, "dear Major Stacey! When?"

"Brother chucked off his mare," said the Major, "all

THE INHERITANCE

girls in that family, you know. Three years, nearly. But he put in a steward and sticks by the service. Says he won't leave these ten years."

"That's like him," said Mrs. Vereker, softly, "did he stay in India?"

It may seem unlikely to you that a child of my age should have noted so clearly the difference between these people and the other citizens on whose daily lives my little life impinged, but I did note it. The desultory talk that went on for an hour, so much more abrupt than ours, apparently, and taking so much for granted that Americans would have been busily explaining to one another; the infinitely wider field of conversation *sans* argument, *sans* lecturing, skipping from India to Bermuda; from the Emperor (sickening even then, and casting the shadow of Sedan before him, though the Major knew it not) to the hunting field; from the frightful cost of transportation in the States as compared with the parcels post, to the Prince Consort—and all in such short words, such pregnant pauses!

When Nana, fascinated with the pleasant English sing-song voice, drew nearer and nearer, the easy, kindly way in which the Major nodded to her, spoke a good word for my health and manners, supposed she missed London, and then ceased to notice her, impressed me greatly. It had taken South Warwick a long time to accustom itself to Nana; anyone who combined complete independence with what she called "knowing her place" puzzled the greater number of her employers and made them a little stiff and conscious with her. She "expected nothing," as the ladies said, and yet she was so obviously superior to the Celtic invasion, who "expected a great deal," as to make them a little uncertain of her exact place in the social scale.

YOU RENEW ACQUAINTANCE

Well, the red rays of the big sun sank lower and lower and turned the grass to emerald, and the amber liquor in the Major's tiny glass grew prismatic and the earrings seemed to stain Mrs. Vereker's creamy cheek, in the glow. Curiously enough, though I never saw her again in anything like such attractive and becoming dress (nor did any one)—it is like that I remember her. No one else that I ever heard of ever came to visit her, and Chrissy's metamorphosed frock was never again assumed. When next I saw her playing with the bloodhound her costume was so different as to warrant a detailed description.

It appears that the Professor, on this memorable afternoon, being as nearly recalled to the visible world as was ever possible in his case, turned his eyes on his daughter and observed that she stumbled frequently. This, though partly due to her youth, was undoubtedly to a certain extent to be explained by her rose-coloured sash, which was bound tightly just below her knees, thereby rendering her progress toward any desired point extremely slow and uncertain.

"The child seems to be trammelled," he said critically, and Nana, thriftily tying the silver up in faded canton-flannel bags, spoke soothingly to him, as was her wont.

"That's true, sir," she admitted, "but then, 'tis a girl, you see, sir, and she must expect it."

"Why?" asked the Professor laconically.

"'Why?'" Nana repeated patiently, "why, because, sir, she must be used to it some time, mustn't she, sir?"

"There are women—there have been women," the Professor continued dreamily, "whose garments have not confined their bodies in the slightest degree."

"But not Christians, sir!" Nana suggested firmly.

"Ah! perhaps not, perhaps not," he agreed, "but that does not prevent the fact that the freedom must be ex-

THE INHERITANCE

tremely desirable, especially in the growing child. The early attempts at locomotion would seem to be sufficiently complicated without adding to the difficulty, in the matter of costume. I will consider the matter more fully."

"Of course, the sash could be tied higher up, sir," Nana ventured, but he waved her off.

"You are like Hamlet, Christopher, you mean to reform it altogether, don't you?" said Mrs. Vereker, laughing, and he gave her a sweet and wonderfully human smile—even I felt it. But what he intended to do nobody so much as dreamed.

On his next constitutional to the barn and back, he drew, Diana told Nana, strange figures in a sand bank behind the cowhouse, and finally requested a large sheet of wrapping paper on which he sketched an uncanny pattern—I say uncanny, because, simply, it appeared so to the scandalized few permitted to see it. Huxley's little grandchildren (Hux married early, and his sons followed his eminently successful example) wear precisely the same garments to-day and call them "overalls." I have seen many small maidens in them, for that matter, prettily pink-and-blue. But none of us had seen them then, and as, at the Professor's request, they were made up out of strong material resembling bed ticking, as the long legs and arms were uncompromisingly unadorned, as, finally and unpardonably, they indicated with anatomical accuracy the fact that Miss Vereker was possessed of two legs, they were from the Warwickian point of view shockingly indecent. For three or four years Chrissy wore them, and Diana enlarged the pattern as fresh air, exercise and food enlarged Chrissy. Her hair was soon cut short by the mulattress, too, who did not care for children and took every means to make her charge as little troublesome as possible. The Professor, pleased with

YOU RENEW ACQUAINTANCE

the success of this, his first sartorial venture, bent his mind upon the question of foot gear, as Chrissy detested shoes and stockings but cut her little feet on the rough stones and briers of the old pastures where she played. A shoemaker was summoned and given a drawing of a strange affair with a strong sole and a top consisting only of two straps and buckles.

"I suppose," said the Professor, "it would not be impossible to make a pair of these?"

"Nothin's impossible, if you've got the leather," said the shoemaker stolidly, "though it looks pretty queer, and that's a fact. I guess the little one will be the first that ever wore 'em."

"Except for a negligible nation or two, yes," said the Professor gravely.

"A nation?" asked the cobbler doubtfully.

"The Greeks, sir," the Professor assured him politely.

"Oh, well, they don't live nowheres about here, I guess," the man of leather commented pityingly, and to this the Professor agreed with a sigh.

That cobbler's son, then a bright boy of twelve or so, followed his father's trade, for a wonder, and has often told me how, sitting in the modern office in his great factory, full of telephones and typewriters and filing systems and electric bells, the remembrance flashed across him, one busy morning, apropos of some customer's complaints that the leather shoes seemed so heavy for summer, of the curious contrivances his father had made for the crazy English gentleman on the Bragg's Hill road, long ago, and he sent for a designer or two and a patent lawyer and an illustrator and an advertising agent, and, shortly after, flooded the world with the famous barefoot sandal for children.

But Professor Vereker was, long before that time, in

THE INHERITANCE

the bosom of Isis (or wherever it is that good Egyptologists go) and never knew to what extent his paternal inspiration was justified.

I wished he could have been with me the day I motored among the New Hampshire hills in the great screaming buff-coloured Panhard in which a wealthy friend of mine stakes our lives when he wishes to gratify us. He is not only very wealthy but curiously humble—to any of us—and this humility and the reason for it is so twisted in with one of the saddest parts of my life that, much as I admire his essentially fine nature, to be with him leaves me in a confusion of regret, remorse and respect too painful to be often undergone. I must tell more of him in a proper place.

On the occasion I have in mind, however, he stopped with something as nearly related to a jerk as he admits the buff-coloured terror is capable of perpetrating, and pointed to a neat little vine-draped cottage in an emerald plot of turf, set back from the road.

“See that?” he queried.

“Do you mean the place, or the old negro on the porch?” I asked, in my turn.

“Both, doctor,” he answered.

“After I had cleaned up a pretty good pile—oh, say ten years ago, I was coming through here, to see how the little fire-engine affair I’d given the village was working—you know I lived here when I was a boy, once, for a little while. Well, my car broke down and I stopped here for repairs at the blacksmith’s yonder, and stepped in here for a drink of water. Nothing but water for me, since—oh, well, *you* know.”

I did know, and I winced. Oh, Bert, Bert, why need it have happened?

“Well,” he went on hastily, his eyes averted, “there

YOU RENEW ACQUAINTANCE

was an old darkey woman sitting on that porch, sewing, and she seemed sort of superior, somehow, and very soft spoken, and offered me some red flowers I admired. 'They look like the red stuff that grew in a place I used to live in,' says I.

"'Where was that, sir?' she says.

"'South Warwick,' says I.

"'For the Lord's sake, sir,' she cried out, getting up suddenly, 'I lived there twenty-one years! Might I ask your name?'

"Of course she didn't know it when she heard it—I was only there a little while, you know—but you can bet I found out about her pretty quick. It seems she used to be a servant in some house there—I couldn't get the name at all, after all. But whenever I'm up this way I look her up. Anybody from *that* town, you know . . .

"I offered her some little present or other, but she wouldn't touch it. She got me out some tea and some ginger preserves—my, they were great, those preserves! —and a young darkey woman living with her told me they were very comfortable indeed; the old woman had made a neat little nest-egg selling those calico overalls the kids wear now, you know. It seems the old woman invented 'em herself, and sent 'em all over the country long before the big stores took 'em up. So they'd saved enough to get along, though their orders were smaller now. Funny thing, she told me, they were really thought up by a man, a writing chap, that was her employer for all those twenty-one years."

"Was the name Vereker?" I cried, and he stared.

"That's it—Vereker! Why—of course!"

I made him turn back, and we went up to the clean little kitchen. I doubt if I should have known

THE INHERITANCE

her, she was so withered and darkened, but when I asked:

“Is this you, Diana?” a look of comprehension dawned in her failing eyes, and she staggered up and dropped a curtsey.

“It’s Master Hugh, Diana, the Professor’s friend and Miss Chrissy’s, don’t you remember? That lived in South Warwick?”

“Warwick, yes, sir, Warwick,” she mumbled, but the light faded out again, and we left her to her dozing and dreaming.

How Chrissy romped and climbed and swung and jumped in those ridiculous Noah’s Ark garments! (By the way, I am told they call them “rompers” now.)

After I left Mrs. Parrott’s for “Number Six,” I scarcely saw Chrissy again for the five years that I roamed, a lawless little “ganger,” under Rob’s leadership. I scorned girls then, and the views I caught of her from time to time, when we went nutting, or after choke-cherries, or gypsy-baiting, were not conducive to masculine admiration. Once I saw her battling with a young, trampish boy who had sneaked in under the tree she was beating and began to pick up her nuts. She came down like a flash, hand over hand, and wrestled with him fiercely, not biting nor screaming nor gulping (great tricks of her sex when so engaged) but in a stern retributive silence. Her dog was not with her, for some reason, and she was hard put to it, but she won, and drove him off snarling. It must have been about this time that I fought a gang of hoodlums that came out to make fun of her “boys’ clothes,” as they called them. I was beaten, of course, but between the three of us, Chrissy, the hound and me, we punished them pretty fairly, and the other boys got up in time to save the day. Chrissy had a cut

YOU RENEW ACQUAINTANCE

lip and a bruise on her forehead, and if she cried, it was from baffled rage alone. As a result of this battle Nana managed to get her into frocks again, to her bitter disgust, for she sulked and tore them off until they had to burn the old emancipated, trouser-legged garb to ashes. Then she took to shoes, Nana told us, and by the time I left for Crane Academy, she must have looked much like any other broad, brown, silent little girl of two or three years more than she, for she was very large for her age.

She never was known to have an illness of any sort, Nana said, and was never seen with any other playmate than the great hound. The wind and the brook and the big rocks of Bragg's Hill were her companions, and in the light of what they made her, finally, I could wish more growing girls better acquainted with these friends.

CHAPTER IX

In Which I Grow Up

ISOMETIMES think that men may be classified broadly as those who have or have not had a happy youth. I say men, because women seem so much more flexible; so much better able to grow flowering vines over the ugly rocks of their past years; so much quicker to forget what they do not wish remembered. I have never known a man (who was not an artist) possessed of the ability to really give himself up to happy hours in middle life, if his childhood had been cheated of such hours. Which seems unfair, somehow, but . . . when was this odd business of life ever fair? More than kind, sometimes, for me—but less than decent, in turn, for you! No, no, the only place you may look for logic and certainty is in Euclid—and even he had to assume his axioms!

They tell me the Germans are questioning *them*, now, by the way (since there was nothing left for them to question, I suppose), which must be a great joy to the schoolboys. And this brings me back to my mutton again and the fact that as a schoolboy I was very happy. As I look back on the six years of my life at Crane's, I am sure it is no deceitfully rosy glow of memory that veils my youth there. For the essentials of happiness can all be counted coldly: I was among those I loved, I was healthy, I was in comfortable circumstances, and I was kept so busy that my play hours were highly valued.

I GROW UP

Dr. Crane's school would have been a credit, I believe, to any generation of boys; in ours it was a marvel. His father had taken him and his brothers to Switzerland for their education, and he had imported the discipline and other good features from Vevay, grafted onto it the English system of honours and responsibilities among the boys, and added the rough-and-ready democracy of his native country to a better housing and feeding plan than Europe (I am convinced) ever offered in any school!

How proud I was the day when I heard my name read out on the list, after Friday prayers, as among the three selected, for general standing, to dine with the doctor's family the next Sunday noon! Under sixteen, for Sunday dinner at noon; over sixteen, to Thursday dinner at night, was the rule, and it was regarded as no empty honor. The doctor and his family lived in the right wing of the great house, entirely separate, with a separate front door and a large lawn and verandah away from the playing field. A distant relative of his, Miss Temperance, was school housekeeper, as Mrs. Crane had no connection whatever with the institution, to the never-ending gossip of South Warwick, which considered that she held herself absurdly high, but was gratified when asked to her evening parties. Her old coachman was one of the few liveried men in the town, and her daughters had a governess.

Oh, Dossy! Oh, Pippy! Oh, Lulu! I can see you now, and if you are confused in my mind with roast turkey, baked sweet potatoes glazed with sugar, frozen pudding with figs and almonds in it, and nuts and port (we called it port wine) afterwards, it is only because I met you all together.

Dossy's name was Dorothea, and she was tall, blonde and slender, with dark blue eyes and a very tiny waist.

THE INHERITANCE

Pippy's name was Philippa, and she was medium-sized and dark, with plump, laughing shoulders and a dimple, and loved a joke. Lulu's name was Henrietta, and she was small and unspeakably graceful, with sandy hair, green eyes and any amount of freckles. Everybody at Crane's fell madly in love with Dossy at sight, grew tired of her by degrees, and found that Pippy was more fun, then, by some mysterious but inevitable influence, realized that it was Lulu he had loved all the time, and rarely recovered entirely till he left the academy. It was no surprise to any boy at Crane's when Lulu married the handsomest and richest young man that ever visited Warwick, and all the mothers wondered how on earth that plain, little, green-eyed, freckled creature had ever attracted young Fortunatus! We knew. Nor, on the other hand, were we very much in the dark as to why Dossy, called for long the prettiest girl in Warwick, finally at the age of twenty-five (a ripe age, then, my masters!) accepted the hand of one of her father's young teachers. The mothers all wondered, but we didn't. Somehow, Dossy didn't wear. Pippy (bless her!) never married at all, though she must have had dozens of offers. She got better looking all the time, and at forty was one of the handsomest women I have ever seen, with thick, crinkly, iron-grey hair and the dimple deeper than ever. She never found the man, she told me then, that could have stood her sense of humour, and perhaps she was right, but I can't help thinking that old Mother Nature misses Pippy's boys and girls out of her scheme, and would gladly exchange Dossy's pale and commonplace youngsters for them. As for Lulu's, she has soared so high out of our sphere that I don't know anything about them.

I made quite a name for myself by skipping the Dossy phase entirely and becoming at once and for six years

I GROW UP

Pippy's faithful slave. Lulu, for some reason, I didn't care for very much or very long, and she was always rather interested in me on that account. More than once she has invited me to share Hux's anise confections with her, and on one celebrated occasion asked me on a canoeing expedition with Bert and had Bert paddle us! But that might have been, as he explained later, only for the purpose of making him jealous. He was the only boy who ever kept in with all three sisters at one time, and it is said that Dossy and Pippy came to blows about him in the rhododendron shrubbery near the big gold-fish globe. But as Lulu was playing mumble-peg with him at the time, it didn't so much matter what they did.

They sat in a short pew together at the Congregational Church (the official church of the school) between their mother and Miss Temperance, the doctor heading three long pews of boys behind. Dossy wore pale blue, Pippy deep pink, and Lulu a misleading sort of putty-colour with green ribbons. These facts I learned from Rob and Hux, who went to church there with the other boys, to Nana's scandalization. Aunt Addie had come too late to have much effect on their habits, but Bert, Cary and I were all confirmed together, and they only escaped now and then, when Bert felt the need, from Mr. Applegate, and I, of course, never left his fold. He had a settled sermon for every season of the Christian year, and we soon got to know them almost as well as he did. It is quite true that Bert prompted him once, in an Advent sermon, when his mind wandered!

He had come to America, an optimistic British youngster of twenty-odd, with a pink little British wife hardly out of her 'teens, some fifteen years before we did. I suppose that by the time he had Aunt Addie in whom to confide his disillusionments, he had really almost forgot-

THE INHERITANCE

ten them, and grown quite accustomed to playing second fiddle to the two Congregational churches which, with three or four exceptions in our favour, divided the aristocracy of the town.

Nana couldn't understand it, frankly, and held long—if respectful—arguments over it with Aunt Addie.

"To have the chapel folk take the lead, Miss Caldwell!" she would breathe sadly, "but it seems fair wicked, and Mrs. Crane such a real lady!"

"Of course, in New York, it's different," Aunt Addie would reply, "and you may be thankful, Mrs. Palse, that we are not living in Boston, with that dreadful Mr. Theodore Parker's sermons read every Sunday! Dr. Crane is descended from Jonathan Edwards, you know, and so, of course . . . Not that he believes, of course, that the poor little babies will be burned . . . but his wife was a Quincy. And that reminds me, Mrs. Palse, could you spare a day or two this week to show Norah about some quince marmalade?"

It is probable that this conversation was responsible for Nana's attitude towards a great book of Professor Vereker's, whose illustrations delighted my soul at one period. She found me once studying with horrid joy an old woodcut of a great cage of wicker-work filled with Druidical victims, in the process of being burned, with many severe Druids, carrying knives and mistletoe, stalking around it.

"Ugh! Nasty dissenting things!" said Nana with a shudder, and when I, fourteen, classical, and otherwise erudite, informed her seriously that at that period of the world's history the Druids, far from being dissenters, were on the contrary ardent members of the then Established Church of England, she turned on me fiercely.

"I'll thank you for none of that nonsense, Master

I GROW UP

Hugh! I know all about that dreadful old Jonathan Edwards and his burnt babies. Disgusting, I call it. I take notice that Dr. Crane burned none of his own, though!"

There was nothing with which to meet all this confusion of ideas but a tolerant masculine sigh, which I forthwith heaved, and closed the book.

And how did I happen to be opening and closing books at the Professor's?

By what we call, of course, mere chance—if there really is such a thing!

A few days after my fourteenth birthday I had gone, in response to a message from Nana, to the Verekers, in order to take some important parcel or other to Mrs. Applegate from her. Nana was nursing the cook, who had an attack of jaundice, and had utilized the occasion (Nana's usual method with occasions) to persuade Diana, who was a wonderful needlewoman and laundress, to "do up," mend and incidentally decorate with a trifle of simple embroidery, the little store of clerical linen that hung in Mr. Applegate's professional wardrobe.

St. Matthews' was distinctly looking up in these days. Not only had the Lees and the Peyton's joined us (and though they were poor as church mice, they were "quality" of the first order, and well did South Warwick learn that lesson!) but Aunt Addie, under the impression that she had originated the idea, suggested to Mrs. Applegate that if Dr. Crane's boarding-school should be thoroughly canvassed it was more than likely that a certain number of "Church-boys" would be found, whose parents, if written to, would be glad to have their children attend St. Matthews' rather than the "First Church."

"Of course," said Aunt Addie, in the piercing tones necessary if any successful communication was to be

THE INHERITANCE

made to her hearer, "of course, as Mrs. Palse says, it would have to be done very specially, by Mr. Applegate, and in such a way that the Doctor wouldn't mind. But they're our boys and we ought to have them—if there are any."

And so a list was obtained, and letters were despatched, and parental consent was got, and as a result seven young gentlemen appeared on Easter Sunday, led by one of the teachers, and filled a pew discreetly thereafter. And before the next long vacation began, seven young ladies (by a curious coincidence!) marshalled by a strict and extraordinarily High Church drawing teacher, paraded every Sunday from Miss Hoppin's Select Seminary for Young Ladies to the seat across the aisle from the seven young gentlemen.

Miss Fanny Banks taught these their Collects and responses in the Sunday school that Nana had supposed sacred to the needs of what she persisted in calling "the villagers'" children, and couldn't understand how it was possible that little Chrissy Vereker could be considered eligible to its ranks.

"If the young ladies were wishful to *teach*, now," she would say stiffly, and only yielded her point to Mr. Applegate himself.

"You know, it's different at home," he pleaded earnestly, and Nana sniffed, murmured something about "burnt babies," and yielded. Miss Ellaline Rogers had the Sunday school room repainted and the little wheezy melodeon repaired; the Miss Peyton's covered the small store of library books with fresh chocolate-coloured muslin, and pasted on new titles written in a spidery hand. Miss Fanny Banks donated twenty-five new volumes (how Dossy and Pippy wept over *The Daisy Chain* and *The Pillars of the House!*) and Mrs. Levi Bragg, not to

I GROW UP

be outdone, carpeted the church itself, so that with its ivy-smothered walls and quaint, unpretentious, coloured windows, it looked a very prosperous little House of God indeed, and began to draw quite a contingent of young people, who came at first to see the summer visitors from the city, and remained out of sheer interest in the beautiful old liturgy and the reverent pageant of the Church's commemorative year.

Diana turned out (by one of Nana's intuitive strokes of genius) to have been specially trained in the cutting and embroidering of churchly vestments, and under the delighted superintendence of Miss Hoppin's drawing-teacher, constructed a new and beautiful set of these garments, and the drawing-teacher's brother, a curate in Trinity Parish, preached a series of Lenten sermons in them that actually became quite "the thing" in South Warwick, so that on Good Friday the little building was crowded to the doors and the boys from Dr. Crane's (all in the confirmation class) had to bring in chairs from the Sunday school room and put them in the aisles! Mrs. Applegate wept from excitement, and there were forty-eight dollars in the alms-basin.

Well! It was on an errand in the matter of these vestments that I came to the Professor's that day and made one of the great discoveries of my life.

For as I waited patiently enough, in the book-filled dining-room, wondering vaguely what had become of the little girl that used to live there, and whether she ever learned to swim, and if it were true that she didn't come to the Sunday school because her father wanted her to learn all about all the religions in their historical order before she became conversant with Christian doctrines, my eye fell on a large, dimly lettered, fat, black, leather volume with an embossed golden picture on the cover, of

THE INHERITANCE

a man dropping a tight bundle from his back into an interesting pit full of horned devils and leering satyrs, leaping in flaming fire. I drew it toward me languidly, unclasped the great tarnished clasps that shut it together, and opened wherever the leaves might fall apart. Pomegranates and bells twined about the large, clear print, framing it as if it were a picture; and between the double columns of each page grew a slender mysterious tree with an evil snake folded among the branches. Like the rubrics of the Prayer-book, there were little headings done in red, and where I opened, these read:

“Mr. Valiant summoned . . . His will . . . his last words.

“Then,” said he, ‘I am going to my Father’s . . . My sword I give to him that shall succeed me in my Pilgrimage, and my Courage and Skill to him that can get it . . . my Marks and Scars—I carry with me.’ . . .

“When the day that he must go hence was come, many accompanied him to the riverside, into which as he went he said, ‘Death, where is thy sting?’ and as he went down deeper, he said, ‘Grave, where is thy victory?’

“So he passed over, and all the Trumpets sounded for him on the other side.”

And with those trumpets sounding in my ears I turned back the pages and read, now here, now there, of that brave, ageless Pilgrim and his wondrous Progress through life, which has never changed, to the celestial city, which has, somehow, in all these years, altered considerably in the theory of its architecture, customs, and population!

I don’t remember, honestly, if I had read many—or any—books before that day: I must have, I suppose. But they could have made little impression on me, for I

I GROW UP

never took them at all seriously, nor, I am sure, spent much time with them.

But that afternoon (a cool, mellow October one, I remember, with yellow leaves drifting down from a deep blue sky, and the winey flavour of them mounting to the nostrils) some door opened widely before me, and great endless vistas of delight stretched out into the future; some veil dropped, swiftly and silently, from my eyes, and I beheld the great, beneficent fields of Art, spreading away and away into the dim distance, ready for me whenever I should desire them; something woke and stirred in my tight-sealed, childish soul and whispered, "This that you see and touch and hear is not all! There is a worldful of other things you never suspected, ready to be lived in, to be enjoyed, to be made your very own!"

In other and perhaps clearer words, I had discovered Literature.

To many—perhaps most—of my readers this discovery has never come. It may be that they have always lived in the great country, or walked into it so young or so gradually that there was no moment when their freehold was lacking there. But with me there is always the memory of that dated hour, that point in space and time, when I stood silent, like Balboa upon his peak, and gazed, awakened, upon the great ocean, all unsuspected till now, that glittered before me in that October sun.

There was no such collection of books in the town (or in many towns, for that matter), and from that time on I can see that my detachment from Bert and Cary began. Rob and Hux were studying hard for their examinations, and quite out of our lives, just then. They even ate their dinner with the school (to gain the advantage of the table conversation, carried on in German),

THE INHERITANCE

and went on long geological rambles, which were very popular at about that time, accompanied by one of the teachers and a number of little bags and hammers, when they were not engaged in translating Greek and Latin. They stood high in Dr. Crane's regard, and their father was very proud of them. Cary took a sudden turn for the better, and grew quite strong, for him, with the result that he threw himself feverishly into the sports and companionships not always possible for him, and became one of a trio of inseparables who parted only for the night. It might have been a quartette, for either Bert or I would have been welcome, but Bert was pleased to find them a little young for him, and I, not sorry to find Cary no longer entirely dependent on us, slipped away to the Professor's books just often enough to break the continual intimacy that such a small band needs, so that we five became slowly and insensibly separated, never, I can see now, to be together on quite the old terms.

It was in these next two years, I believe, that Bert began to develop that life apart from the rest of us that no one, at that time, suspected. The doctor does not agree with me, and believes with Nana, that, years ago, among the livery-stable hangers-on and the gipsy squatters near the pond were sowed the seeds of those childish wild oats that we supposed buried under the neat gravel walks of all the terms at Crane's Academy. Ah, well, what does it matter, now? Maybe it was born in him, as old Norah always maintained,—that subtle taint of blood, that little, ugly trait of secrecy, that unquenchable thirst for the lawless, the hidden, the unconventional, the proscribed.

Nobody knew when he made those expeditions on which he learned so much unknown to us: he never seemed to be absent from schoolroom or playground any

I GROW UP

more than the rest of us. He was known—and liked—by every boy in the Academy. But the young men about Fox's bar knew him, too, and the snickering loafers at the old stable, and the gipsies and the travelling actors that played in the old town hall.

Mrs. Applegate adored him and would never listen to Nana's fears that he smoked those dreadful cigarettes that he rolled up in tissue paper, and Lily Peyton gave him a piece of her hair in a locket; but Fanny Pratt was seen wearing the locket one day, and after that Bert was never inside the Peyton gates, and Fanny's mother put her in the Sisters' school—though it was whispered that she went down on her knees to Father Ryan before he'd let the girl in. Fanny's father was the ticket agent at the station, and there is no doubt she hung about the tracks too much. "The tracks" made a social district of their own, and I shall never forget Rob's face on the day when, back from his successful examinations—we had all marched up with him to the academy to hear him tell the Doctor—he had looked around him as we entered the big gates, saying, "Where's Bert?" and a butcher boy, driving his red wagon through as we passed him, mimicked scornfully, "'Where's Bert? Where's Bert?' Better go down to the tracks, Mr. Rob Caldwell—you're sure to find him there!"

Bert was fifteen then, and well grown for his age, and when the Doctor and Aunt Addie found out after Rob's stormy outburst, for he *had* gone down to the tracks and *had* found Bert there, not in the most creditable circumstances for the brother of a Yale freshman of good standing—when they found this out and a great deal more, that was not such a surprise to some people as it was to Dr. Caldwell, it was felt that Bert had been taken in time and that a new start would be made. Well, well

THE INHERITANCE

—I don't know. Perhaps it *would* have been in time for another boy . . . perhaps.

One day, when I had quite got into the way of spending two or three afternoons in the week at the Verekers—I came quietly in through the kitchen, and roamed about that floor as I wished, with the Professor's cordial consent—I glanced up from my book—(it was the Arabian Nights) with the sensation of being looked at, and found a girl in a short, tight frock staring at me from a pile of lexicons on which she was sitting.

Her dark hair was cut only a little longer than a boy's, and hung elfishly about her face, which was tanned to a rich, even brown; her eyes were deep-set and dark, with heavy, straight brows; her lips firmly shut. I had not seen her for a long time, but I knew it was Chrissy Vereker.

"Hello," I said patronisingly, "how do *you* do? Do you go to school yet?"

For it was a scandalous fact that when last I had heard of her she could not even read, as she had behaved so strangely at old Mrs. Parrott's that the Professor had been forced to remove her from that abode of learning.

"No," she replied calmly, "I don't. I don't like schools."

"So I hear," said I maliciously; "the schools don't like you either, do they?"

She looked at me quietly for a moment longer, then got up, with a certain clumsy dignity, and walked away, leaving me a little uncomfortable, though of course I wouldn't admit it. It wasn't very polite, what I had said, to be sure, but then, I didn't think the occasion called for politeness, precisely. It was only Chrissy Vereker, and she was only nine years old, a tomboy, who couldn't even read. From one who measured girls by

I GROW UP

Dossy and Pippy, one who wore long trousers and read *Cæsar's Commentaries*, it was incredible that such a coltish creature should expect anything but an amused tolerance, and that was what I had meant to convey.

When I met her again she was nursing her big hound, who had run a thorn into his foot, and the handy way in which she washed and bandaged it rather impressed me.

"Big fellow, isn't he?" I asked, and she nodded silently.

"Do you remember the day we fought the town boys in Bragg's wood?" I asked her, and she smiled gravely and nodded again.

Do you notice how easily I said "town boy"? And yet, four years ago, I had been a "town boy" myself, and all unknown to Mrs. Crane and the Misses Peyton. I was honestly unconscious of it.

She seemed a jolly little thing enough when she smiled, and her very taciturnity made one interested in "drawing her out," as the phrase goes. It seemed she knew Bert quite well, and often spent hours with him while he fished the upper lengths of the Mill River.

"I like him," she said briefly. "He tells me nice stories."

"I'll tell you one, if you like," said I, and then, on second thoughts, I took her into the dining room and read her from the *Mort d'Arthur*, which she appeared to enjoy very thoroughly.

"Now, if you knew how to read," I appended instructively, "see how you would enjoy this book yourself. Why don't you learn?"

She bent her brows thoughtfully. "But I *do* know how," she said quietly, "only not in English. That book is in English."

"What can you read?" I asked, amused.

"Latin," she answered.

THE INHERITANCE

"Wh-what Latin?" I stammered distrustfully.

"Oh, Ovid, and about Balbus and Medusa, and other things," she said vaguely; "my father says Latin came first and I must read it first."

When Dr. Crane, amused and scandalised at this story, made a call upon the Professor to inquire of him why, at that rate, he hadn't started Chrissy on Coptic, which had the advantage of Latin in the matter of priority, to say nothing of the Early Saxon Chronicles, the Professor staggered him by replying simply that he had, but that the child hadn't at that time the necessary degree of concentration for either! Geometry, however, he added, she mastered easily, and greatly interested the doctor by showing him the whitewashed walls of the cowhouse, completely frescoed with large theorems done in charcoal.

"At that rate," the doctor commented, "she must have been at fractions when she was seven."

"She has never heard of them," the Professor replied, and then it came out that Chrissy didn't know her tables, and couldn't have told you seven times eight to save her life!

At this point the doctor threw up his hands in despair and rode away (he rode everywhere on a great, gray mare), and told us all about it on the Thursday after my sixteenth birthday, when, with outward flippancy but inward pride, I dined at half past six with his family. Pippy, a year older than I, had just put up her hair, and Dossy, reported to be engaged to Miss Hoppin's drawing teacher's brother, was ethereally lovely in pale sky blue. Lulu, who was paying for years of heart breaking by a real and not-too-steadily-reciprocated attachment for Bert, sulked quietly next her mother because Bert's standard of work had not allowed him to come to Thursday dinner yet. Mrs. Crane, I think, was

I GROW UP

glad of this, and we knew, somehow, that she was glad. We had an idea, too, why it was that she was glad. And yet when Bert jumped for her parasol, opened it for her with his winning smile (which no woman, child or animal, I believe, ever resisted), patted her pug, a hateful little beast that snapped at every boy in the school but him, and hoped she'd have a pleasant drive, she smiled back at him as she never smiled at Rob or Hux!

Hux went up to Yale that autumn, and Bert and I went upstairs to the doctor's own room, and I was monitor for the little fellows, adjudged their grievances, sat at the German conversation table and answered quite as often to the name of "Caldwell senior" as to my own. Even Dr. Crane called me that. There had always been a Caldwell senior and a Caldwell junior, and Bert and I had their desks. Up to sixteen we had been Bert and Hugh. ("Bert," though nicknames were strictly taboo in the schoolroom). But *Bert Caldwell* couldn't be changed, it seems: the girls on the hill and the loafers at the tracks, Mrs. Crane and little Chrissy Vereker, all called him that.

Before the winter came on, the Doctor and Aunt Addie called me down from our study one evening, where I was helping Cary with his algebra, too much, already, for his fretful attention, for he had had a bad summer, and looked pinched and worn. Bert was out somewhere, no one knew exactly where, though we all supposed (or said we supposed) he was with a crowd of decent enough young lads who were going to serenade Miss Hoppin's girls.

"Hugh," said the Doctor, "are you staying here to-night?"

"Yes, sir," I said, "Nana is afraid those people down

THE INHERITANCE

at Harbor Point have scarlet fever. She said I'd better stay till they were sure."

"Glad to have you," he answered musingly. Then, "Let's see, Hugh; you're with us quite as much as you're at the cottage, aren't you?"

"Oh, yes, sir—more, I suppose. Isn't that so, Aunt Addie?"

She smiled at me: Bert and I were always her favourites.

"Well, well, all the better then," he said. And then, as simply as possible, the next great change in my life slipped quietly into place.

Mrs. Vereker had been coughing slightly all summer, and now, by September, the cough was worse. Native air, in the Doctor's opinion, was indicated, and he had strongly advised her spending the winter in Bermuda. A sudden chance to go, slowly and in comparative comfort, in the one ladies' cabin on a big schooner, had turned up, and she had agreed to start in a few days, taking Diana with her. The older mulattress was perfectly competent to attend to the Professor's simple wants, and neither of them had even so much as mentioned poor Chrissy, who, bereft of even Diana's grudging superintendence, would run wilder and more spindle-shanked than ever. It had occurred, said the Doctor, to—to—well, who had suggested it, Addie? Aunt Addie seemed vague, but supposed that she had, and he, though unconvinced, finally supposed so, too. At any rate, it had occurred—to somebody—that the situation would become perfectly simplified if Chrissy should go to Nana for the winter (Nana had a neat, careful young North-of-Ireland girl as general servant, now she was out at nursing so much), and I should move definitely into my old room at the Doctor's. This arrangement would be necessary,

I GROW UP

inasmuch as there were but two bedrooms in the cottage and a tiny cupboard for the little servant.

It all seemed as simple as *bon jour* to me, and a great thing for Chrissy (we all knew that the yellow-faced cook had never loved her), and without a word to Nana, even, I moved what few things I kept at the cottage away from it, the day that Mrs. Vereker sailed for Jamaica. Nana was too busy to leave her case, and I moved out of the room I was never to occupy again with as little interest as if the seed of my life had not been sown there. O youth, youth, youth!

The Doctor and I drove the Vereker family to the wharf to see Mrs. Vereker off. Even the Doctor was surprised at the fact that the captain offered to bring the schooner to South Warwick harbour for his passenger—nobody had dreamed of such a thing.

“There must be a good deal of influence at work somewhere, my boy,” he muttered to me, as the gruff captain came off his graceful winged craft, cap in hand, to lead his languid passenger aboard. There were fruit and flowers, too, in the spotless little cabin, and it glistened with new paint.

“Ah, Captain Pedgett, this is very kind, I’m sure,” she said, but she did not appear to be greatly surprised. Quite a crowd had assembled to see the big schooner start, and Bert, who turned up arm in arm with one of his new cronies, a daredevil sort of fellow who sailed races for money in his own catboat, whispered to us that an awning had been rigged on the deck for her and one of the ship’s boys told off for her special service.

“Good-bye, Doctor, many thanks for everything,” she said; “good-bye, Chrissy, be a good child and mind Mrs. Palse. Don’t bring the dog into the house. *Au revoir*, Christopher; I’ll send you some curry—put those books

THE INHERITANCE

in the cabin, please, boy! I'll write you when I'm coming back."

The Professor waved his hat gallantly. "Do, my dear," he said, "and I shall let you know if I am right about that scarab in Bologna. I am confident it is an imitation. Say good-bye, Chrissy."

"Good-bye," said Chrissy awkwardly. "Why do those white sheets on the sticks make the boat move, Bert?"

And thus, her adieux to her family being made, Mrs. Vereker sailed away from us, and we never saw her again.

Mysterious woman that she was, did any one know the key to her? Was she happy or unhappy, incredibly foolish or incredibly wise? Was South Warwick, so keen, for the most part, at unearthing the odd and interesting, a little off its guard in the case of Mrs. Christopher Vereker? I don't know, frankly. But I know that when I think of that curious embarking, and recall her as she walked gently, with a slight swaying movement, up the gangplank on the captain's eager arm, I see her, not as she undoubtedly appeared, but as she looked on that day seven years back, under the sugar maple, all in flowing white, with carbuncles smouldering at her throat and ears, and her dark hair rolled high under the high, white ivory comb.

I don't know whether Aunt Addie was most shocked at Chrissy's keen interest in her new room at the cottage or the Professor's complete forgetfulness of her. Both were, at any rate, quite sincere and unaffected. Nana had moved into my old room, the smaller of the two, and when Bert and I helped Thomas up with the little boxes that held Chrissy's pathetic wardrobe and few treasures, we all admired the results of the days of preparation Aunt Addie had described to us. Out of the

I GROW UP

sum the Professor had insisted upon handing over in a lump, a gay pink-and-white paper had been put on the walls; the prettiest of the pictures from the *London Graphic*, sent regularly to Aunt Addie and begged from Bert and me, whose perquisites they were, had been framed and hung; the invaluable Hoppin drawing teacher had repainted in charming flowery garlands a set of quaint old-fashioned chairs resurrected by Nana from somebody's attic; and there was that delicious coquettish purity of snowy curtain and ruffled dressing table that women know so well how to produce, when their hearts are in it.

To Chrissy it must have seemed a little paradise, and she retired into it without so much as a thank you or a good-bye for any of us, an overgrown little figure in a frock too tight and childish for her, with wild, stiff hair under a bonnet all askew. Even the Doctor noted her unintended appearance.

"But we may depend on Mrs. Palse, I am sure, eh, Professor?" he said hopefully, and the Professor, jerked back from some Egyptian reverie, blinked, nodded, and agreed generally.

"Ah, yes, quite as you say, we all depend on Mrs. Palse," he replied politely, and walked back alone to the Delta of the Nile.

Nana was never three days together without dropping in on us that autumn, for the terrible servant question grew worse and worse as Aunt Addie grew more and more irritable with her increasing sciatica and rheumatism, and there was no hand like Nana's for bringing order into the kitchen or relief to Aunt Addie's aching muscles. I saw her, accordingly, quite as often as if I had been living at the cottage, and thus had no occasion to go there; and though we never talked for long at a

THE INHERITANCE

time, because, naturally, the next-to-head boy at a young gentlemen's academy, with German conversation and junior discipline on his mind, can have few conversational topics in common with his old nurse, we always passed the time of day, as Nana said, and it was well understood that we did, for I have more than once, while waiting for some classmate on the hill, heard the voice of his Family explaining loudly to Mrs. Applegate:

"Yes—just waiting for my son. Mrs. Palse has been looking after my daughter, this time. So sweet, I think, and thoughtful of Hugh, never to forget how she used to take care of him! An old family servant, you see. . . ."

And I, blushing a little, could not but feel, nevertheless, that the family voice was right and that I *was* rather thoughtful!

Cary had to leave school the year that Hux went up to Yale, and crawled restlessly about from bed to sofa, passing long, silent days with his face to the wall, irritable and irritating. On his good days he drove about with the Doctor and visited the academy, but he could not endure the competition with the other boys, and seemed to cease growing in every way. We had always been good friends, and it was a real distress to me when he began to shrink from me—or more justly, I believe, from the health and activity I could not but contrast with his feebleness—but with the easy selfishness of my sex and age I soon got used to it, and by the winter I had almost ceased to see him.

It was Bert, curiously enough, who took my place, and evening after evening as I studied upstairs I would hear the old piano or the banjo, for hours together, and knew that Bert was giving up his private amusements for his

I GROW UP

sickly brother's sake. I say amusements, for Bert had long ceased to study at night. His native quickness and wonderful memory enabled him to hold a fair, or nearly fair, place in his classes, with the minimum of preparation, and the teachers, though they shook their heads gravely, and held long consultations over him, invariably ended with the inevitable laughter at his ingenious excuses, his clever parodies, his really brilliant caricatures, for he developed at this time a great gift for drawing, or his apparently sincere promise of amendment. The Doctor had no mercy on him, and raged at his selfishness, and selfish, I admit, he was. But the brother whom he subdued his quick temper to endure patiently, the friends to whom he cheerfully offered his last cent, the animals he gave up his sleep to nurse and the tramps who smoked his tobacco and pawned his clothes—did they think him selfish?

Of course, as Rob pointed out, somewhat acridly, Cary was the one member of his family to whom he recognized any obligation; the money he loaned his friends was in reality his father's; the animals that tagged about after him were a public nuisance, and the clothes he gave away he could ill spare—but . . . whoever loved the Elder Brother of the great parable, impregnable in his virtue though he be? If only the charming people could be in the right—since the people who *are* in the right are so seldom charming!

The Christmas holidays began after school dinner, that year, and, coming home quickly, I paused on the stair opposite Aunt Addie's room, attracted by shouts of glee from Cary and a feminine voice unknown to me. My knock was unheard and I entered before the laugh was over. Aunt Addie sat in her great stuffed chair, the book she required a pile of cushions to hold (to save her

THE INHERITANCE

cramped, knotted fingers) forgotten, her face wreathed in smiles. Cary, stretched on her sofa, a gay afghan over his weak legs, fairly held his sides as Bert pranced about the room imitating Mrs. Applegate engaged in polite conversation with the younger Miss Peyton, who never raised her voice in speaking to the deaf, because she considered it unladylike. As Mrs. Applegate never for a moment admitted that she *was* deaf, their conversations were incredible social catastrophes, and scarcely required caricature.

Near Aunt Addie's chair sat a pretty gipsy-like girl, whose thick, heavy hair not even the backcomb then worn by school girls could deform. Her forehead was broad and finely shaped, with a pronounced "widow's peak," her eyes mischievous and yet trusty, her full red lips well cut, over a square, strong chin. She wore a trim dark stuff dress, wine-coloured, with a fresh ruffled white apron over all, tied back into a crisp bow, and even as she laughed aloud, she fitted together bright squares of cambric and sewed at them in a notably house-wifely fashion. I stared. She had a look of—was she . . . yes, she *was* little Chrissy Vereker! With just enough of a look of Pippy Crane to catch one's breath over. For she was plumpish, like Pippy, a robin red-breast of a girl, with a round arm and a broad chest.

I checked them, but only for a moment, for Bert was at his best and irresistible, and Cary good-tempered and generous. We talked and laughed till dusk, and the Doctor joined us and listened to our nonsense, the lines fading from his forehead, with Chrissy cuddled in his arm in an accustomed manner that amazed me no less than her smoothed hair and her sewing. But I had more to learn, for when he asked, "Well, chicken, how are the lessons?"

I GROW UP

she blushed, and bringing out a little pile of books, pointed out map and sum and chapter, while Cary straightened and looked important and Bert mocked him.

"Yes, indeed, Hugh, she can! She learned to read in three weeks! And I must say, Robert, if poor Cary could teach her all this, it speaks badly for Mrs. Parrot, who is not in the least lame!"

Thus Aunt Addie, luminously, and we all laughed again.

"You see, there was something in Nana's scheme, after all," the Doctor put in; "remember how you all made fun of the idea of Cary teaching anybody?"

"Didn't suppose I could, myself," Cary admitted languidly, "but Chrissy knows a queer lot of stuff you wouldn't expect, don't you, Chris?"

"What are you reading?" I asked respectfully, and Chrissy blushed (she always blushed easily, but faced you bravely through it), and handed me the book. It was the *Mort d'Arthur*.

"Oh! you liked it, then!" I said, and she nodded silently.

"Is this my quilt?" the Doctor asked, fingering the bright squares, and she unearthed from her little round basket countless others, sewed into quartettes, and laid them on his knee.

"You ought to have had a daughter, Robert," said Aunt Addie, and we all nodded soberly, for every lad is a father of girls in his deeper heart.

Nana said she took to her needle like a duck to water—though, to carry on the simile, no maternal hen could have been more surprised at her foster duckling's aquatic capacities than Mrs. Vereker would have been at Chrissy's needlework.

THE INHERITANCE

"Who will walk home with Chrissy, boys?" Aunt Addie asked presently. "Nana will be anxious."

Bert and I spoke together, but neither of us could have been much surprised when she chose him!

CHAPTER X

In Which We Begin to Leave the Nest

I WONDER if we were ever all together again after that first summer I came home from Yale? I don't think so. There seems to be in most large families (I have often remarked it, since, in my professional practice) a distinct point where disintegration begins, and after that only such crises as weddings and funerals bring the scattered units together again. A friend of mine put it characteristically enough when he said that he never saw the family any more, unless one of his aunts died, and everybody present nodded comprehendingly.

Six of Doctor Crane's boys went to college that year, and we formed, naturally enough, a little clique, with Bert, from the beginning, the most prominent among us, since it was his clever *ruse* that won us the great sophomore-freshman battle, and made his name known in an hour all over the campus. Rob and Hux were half proud, half jealous of this meteoric *début*, and both of them discussed with me the probability of its turning the boy's head and being bad for him in the end, but I don't think it was. Publicity always steadied him, and the fact that he had entered his classes under heavier conditions of incompleted work than Dr. Crane usually allowed and the strictest promises to make up the deficiencies, kept us closer together than I had dared to hope we should be. Except for a few outbreaks of boyish, undergraduate vandalism and a few unfortunate wine

THE INHERITANCE

suppers, we got him through the year very well, and the Doctor met him with a hearty handshake at Christmas.

How delightful that winter holiday was! The dressing of our little church had grown, in the last few years, into a curious little social function—curious, in that the young people of Warwick's "first families," without regard to creed, had come to consider it as their duty and privilege to decorate St. Matthews' from altar to font (in that church, the font stood at the entrance) with the choicest of cedar, holly and mistletoe. There was a tacit but well-formulated age limit, and girls of fifteen waited eagerly till next Christmas, and girls of much more than twenty openly regretted that their time was past. More than this there was, *bien entendu*, a caste limit, and woe to the forth-putting maiden who offered her services, unsolicited, for the occasion. Not that the elect were solicited—far from it. There was no doubt in their minds—"they knew," as Pippy Crane explained succinctly to me, on the occasion of Miss Susy Farwell's boarder's daughter. That was a slightly contested field, for we boys rather "took to" the boarder's daughter, and had skated with her on the millpond and danced the Mother Goose lancers with her in the great "Kermess" held in the town hall for the benefit of the prospective South Warwick hospital. She had been Little Bo Peep in those lancers, and most bewitching she was with her crook and short skirts.

Somebody had told her about those evenings of tying and bunching and wreathing, Christmas week, with carol practice later, and hot coffee and cake after that, and she had interpreted Mr. Applegate's brisk little public announcement quite literally and came, bright and early, of a Monday night. And the very girls who had rehearsed the lancers with her and served with her at the candy

WE BEGIN TO LEAVE THE NEST

booth at the Christmas cake sale in the First Church, those very girls, I say—oh well, you know what girls are, don't you? How they can be so . . . so trying, is hard for us to see. The gooseflesh fairly stood out on my spine while Miss Farwell's boarder's daughter learned her little lesson that Monday night.

It was Bert, finally, who took her home haughtily and invited her for a moonlight sleigh ride, and didn't come back to the church that night. Not that this did the poor girl much good in the end, because, unfortunately, after he'd deposited her at Miss Susy's at half past ten, he happened to meet Fanny Pratt, and started out with her again and didn't bring the sleigh back to the livery stable till one. Fanny was just cruel enough to let the confused, whispering gossip go on without clearing the matter up, and finally there had to be a distinctly disagreeable meeting, where Bert and the Doctor and Miss Susy's boarder "had it out" and straightened things—as far as the boarder's daughter went, anyhow. Nobody tried to straighten poor Fanny's affairs by now, I'm afraid, and when the innocent (travelling) manager of the Kermess suggested, for the roller-skating quadrille, "that tall, handsome Miss Pratt, that skates so well," there was an uncomfortable silence and a change of subject that even the boys didn't resent.

Poor Fanny Pratt! Was hers one of the cases of which there must be just so many, and did she happen to be the one in South Warwick? Sometimes I have thought so. Perhaps in a larger city—or a smaller village—she would have settled to one level or another more certainly. As it was, no one, just then, had definitely pronounced the ultimate adjective in Fanny's case. But when we boys skated with her Tuesdays and Fridays, when the old Odd Fellows' hall was turned into a rink, and the roll

THE INHERITANCE

and click was like the surge of the shore, and the band played till midnight (though nice girls left at ten), when, I say, we swayed by, cross-linked with Fanny, we didn't nod to the hill girls; and when we tore down the toboggan slide with her scarlet cap and stylish blanket coat packed in front of us, we didn't wave to them.

Fanny was named after Miss Fanny Bragg, and wore a gold locket with a pearl in it presented at her christening by that lady. She wore, too, a silver bangle hung with ten-cent pieces, each with an engraved monogram on it, and this bracelet might have been used, as far as the male youth of South Warwick went, for a Blue Book of the town! Ten cents was little to give and Fanny had such an attractive, thick-lashed smile! Her eyes were a very dark blue, and the lashes as thick as a paint brush and curly at the ends. She sold so many subscriptions to the *Christian Herald* that she won the first premium of a lady's safety bicycle easily, in advance of all other competitors, and rode it like a darting swallow. (How we laughed at those first "safeties," by the way! Bert and I, perched high on our old-style "bikes," harassed the prim young bank cashier on his, the first man in the town to use the new-fangled low one, till he sold it, out of very shame!)

She was of that social stratum—her mother was a dressmaker—where the girls, in those days, never dreamed of undertaking any trade or profession after they left school, and so, after she had attended to a few negligible household duties, Fanny's time (her mother worked sixteen hours a day) was her own—to the regret of some other mothers of Warwick!

Well, well! As I look back at it all, she appears no Delilah, but a simple-minded, pleasure-loving, easy-going girl, with no education in particular and a heart too soft

WE BEGIN TO LEAVE THE NEST

for her own good. She made delicious peanut taffy and cocoanut cake, and if the light in the Pratt parlour burned beyond the ordinary reception hours of young ladies, why, everybody knew that Mrs. Pratt was up, sewing, in the room above.

Miss Fanny Bragg was often appealed to, to "do something about it," and always replied nervously that if Mrs. Palse had only had that idea of the Girls' Friendly Society a year or two earlier, and if Fanny had only not been Roman Catholic, it might have been different! And perhaps it might.

Chrissy, of course, was much too young for such junketings as church dressing and roller skating, and passed her time, we found out at Easter, mostly at the Doctor's doing lessons with Cary, holding wool, and going errands generally for Aunt Addie, and reading to the Doctor, evenings, when he was free; a practice undertaken as a test of proficiency at first and continued from sheer pleasure to both, after the tests were no longer necessary. The Doctor was a profound lover of Dickens and read little else in the way of fiction. It had not always been convenient to take her home after these sessions, and during one fortnight in March when Nana was taking the rising generation of Bankses through the measles, Chrissy had proved such a pleasant guest that the visit had extended indefinitely and the little guest room being really too small for her trunk and books and work table, the trunk, as the least important, was carried to the attic—and stayed there for four years!

We found her music roll on the hat stand, her stout arctic overshoes in the vestibule, her sun hat in the hall, and her old dog, a little irritable and rheumatic now, lying on the sunny side porch.

"And really, boys, I don't know what your father

THE INHERITANCE

would do without her now," Aunt Addie confided to us. "If Mrs. Vereker ever comes back, he'll miss her terribly. You see, there's no one now but poor Cary, and he's so quiet that the house seems empty without her. You boys were a trouble, goodness knows, but at least you were *alive*!"

Yes, yes, we were alive. And houses that once have echoed to that life seem ghostly and drear without it—even to nervous, middle-aged, spinster aunts! The halls were clean and clear, now, and it was some use painting the dining room, and the porch chairs came in when it rained, and white mice, turtles, rabbits and mongrel pups no longer wandered casually into the drawing room (South Warwick said "parlour," but Aunt Addie and Nana simply couldn't change.) But I really believe the Doctor and Aunt Addie would have welcomed even the turtles, to have us back!

Chrissy had dropped her pinafores and her dresses were quite to her boot tops, she was so large for her age, and her thick hair no longer needed the round comb and flowed smoothly back into a net. She was like any other young girl, in short, except for one curious, great difference: she seemed utterly unconscious of her sex. Of course, we didn't call it that, because we weren't sufficiently wise or analytical, and anyway "sex" wasn't a word much in use in Warwick in the early '80's. It was an odd sort of expression, as Aunt Addie said, and not exactly of the sort one would care to be quoted as having used. Not, of course, that it was necessarily . . . but, in short, it was just as well not.

(Lord, Lord! If poor Aunt Addie could hear Hux's eldest girl on the social evil! And everything she says true, too!)

Well, we only knew that Chrissy didn't giggle, but

WE BEGIN TO LEAVE THE NEST

laughed out, as a boy does; that she never dropped her eyes, but looked straight at you; that her step was free, from the hip, and her grip tight and quick; that she never said those innocent-appearing things that as soon as you answer them tell what you didn't intend—in short, that her mind was more like our own. Her mental processes, I should have said, not her mind. For after all, boys of nineteen, even reasonably decent ones, would hardly allow that a nice little girl of thirteen who had never been to college could have their minds imputed to her dear little innocence. Our speech, at that epoch, was rather like those twisted old-fashioned glass flasks that pour, according as you wish, oil or vinegar, and we took a great deal of satisfaction in turning the flask to suit the social situation. Just as we enjoyed a man-of-the-worldish game of pool in the parlour over Abey Fox's father's saloon, with some of Bert's old livery-stable friends and a commercial traveller or two ("drummers" we called them), and then settled the score, had a glass of beer, and sauntered out in time for clean clothes and a shave—we each had our mug and brush at the barber's and were shaved by one of "the fish monger's twins near the pond"—in time for dinner with Mrs. Crane, and told Pippy and Dossy how well the New Haven girls danced!

Dossy was at her loveliest—she must have been about twenty-two,—and I taught her a new schottische myself, after dinner, with her mother contentedly looking on and Bert playing the banjo to Lulu, who was just about to capture Fortunatus and was the best dancer—except Bert and Fanny Pratt—in Warwick. Had Lulu been twenty to-day, she would have been pirouetting in classic drapery (or out of it) to enraptured audiences after dinner parties; but at that time her parents would never have dared to show their faces in the streets of Warwick if

THE INHERITANCE

any child of theirs had dreamed, in the secret recesses of her chamber, of perpetrating such *pas seuls* as Miss Hoppin's successor undoubtedly offers in her curriculum to-day! *Autres temps*, we can assure you, dear nieces, *autres mœurs*, and perhaps the girls are all the same, always, at heart, as Horace, or somebody equally classic, has undoubtedly said, but they are certainly vastly different at foot and ankle from generation to generation!

That summer, as I said before, somewhere, found us all together, for one delightful season, before the beginning of the end that is, after all, just life. People can't go on picnics and moonlight sails and clam-bakes and hotel "hops" for ever, and of course they don't want to. But what fun they were!

Chrissy developed a perfect genius for planning, engineering, commissarying and transporting these affairs, and as she never expected the least share in what would ordinarily be considered the pleasures of them, from a girl's point of view, always going ahead with Thomas and the hampers and driving home with the Doctor, whom she often persuaded to come (people aren't so sick in the summer—in the country, anyhow), she was quite popular, in a quiet, maiden-auntish sort of way, and loaned hair pins and hat pins and safety pins and plain pins, talked to shy boys, amused little sisters and brothers, washed up and boiled the kettle generally.

Bert picked out the place and time, Rob attended to the invitations, crossing out many of Bert's *invités* (for Rob was by now distinctly a bit of a snob) and Cary delivered the messages over the new telephone (which many people in Warwick didn't know how to use, frankly, and tied up during thunder storms!).

Cary was admittedly incurable, now, and used a crutch. Teaching Chrissy was his one interest, and by that sum-

WE BEGIN TO LEAVE THE NEST

mer he actually had her up to her graded age in the public school in everything, and beyond it, in some branches. It opened my eyes, even then, to the immense amount of time wasted in all routine, mass work, and the little amount gained by each individual child under ordinary school conditions. Ever since then I have been less impressed by the phenomenal progress made by those phenomenal children when taught by devoted enthusiasts; for Chrissy was not particularly intellectual and never loved books for themselves. But she had a pathetic desire to be like other people, and a great deal of pride, and these, with the entire attention of an interested tutor, on his mettle, carried her on with amazing strides.

What baskets she packed! Breasts of chicken, sandwiched into Norah's Parker House rolls; little brown-rimmed tarts, each with a slice of cheese wrapped in with it; ham, minced with home-made pickles, spread on Boston brown bread; sheets of yellow sponge cake; dozens of soft, moist, enormous molasses cookies, to be eaten with "pot cheese," packed into egg shells; lemonade, all mixed but the water, and Mrs. O'Shaugnessy's root beer that frothed all over one's trousers when it was opened—I wonder we had breath to sing as we did, when the moon came up!

First we went in bathing, laughing meanwhile at the wagonloads of country people (real country, from the hills behind the coast) who romped into the water in old skirts and trousers, with straw hats tied on and a terrible fear of wetting their hair. They thought our modest bathing suits indecent and said so loudly, and we felt amused and cosmopolitan and dived from the spring-board, trod water, and smoked cigarettes while swimming, to impress them. They screamed and squawked and jumped up and down in the water, and we imagined

THE INHERITANCE

them on Broadway, with *that* sort of hair cut, and practised overhand strokes.

Chrissy, by the way, was with us here, swimming out with Bert, our best diver and under-water performer, and leaving every one else behind. She never walked into the water, like the other girls, but went off from the end of the pier.

Then in again, to the row of stuffy, tarry little bath houses, two at a time, towelling and puffing, to emerge damp-haired and dying of hunger, and find the beach fire at just the right stage of embers, the coffee breathing Araby the blest, the plates and cups in place, and Chrissy directing Bert as to the courses.

While we flirted and smoked, full fed, she attended to the affairs that Thomas couldn't manage, saw that the Doctor had a coat to sit on, and dropping down near him added her sweet, deep alto to the choruses we sent up to those placid stars that have watched so many young picnickers come and eat and sing and go away again. They shone down over Cemetery Point, those same equal-minded stars, and perhaps saw less difference between its inhabitants and us than we would have relished.

We sang a song that began :

*"There is a tavern in the town,
(In the town!)
And there my true love sits him down
(Sits him down!)"*

and another, a beautiful German harmony :

"Forsaken, forsaken, forsaken, am I,"

that I can't hear now without a twist of the heart, but sang out gaily enough then and,

"How can I bear to leave thee," which was a little

WE BEGIN TO LEAVE THE NEST

too much the good-bye soldier song of the 60's for those parents who came late to bring some of us home, so that they coughed and felt for their pockets and listened to us longer than they meant.

Our songs were sad, mostly about lovers who never came back and friends who were parted—will any one tell me why?—but *we* were not sad; oh, dear, no! Now, it seems to go the other way. . . .

And Lulu Crane looked at Bert's handsome profile, thrown back as he sang in his charming barytone, and Dossy sat near Rob, who didn't sing, and Hux and I threw in a casual bass and Pippy and a summer boarder at Miss Hoppin's led the tune in two of the sweetest sopranos I ever heard. Hux thought so, too, for he sang carefully at the summer boarder. And Miss Peyton, there by sufferance, wished Bert hadn't been so wild and the Doctor was grateful he hadn't been any wilder, and I begged Pippy to wear my college pin till autumn, anyway, and Thomas said the horses had stood long enough.

So we sang ourselves home, and Bert, fully intending to go out again after we were all settled, went softly in to kiss Aunt Addie good night—Aunt Addie, whose heart would be heavy if she knew he was going out again, but would forgive him anything for that kiss!

Ah, well . . .

*“Good night, ladies,
Good night, ladies,
Good night, LADIES.*

We're going to leave you now!”

It's over, all over, and life is fuller now, and deeper—but oh, how happy it all was!

CHAPTER XI

In Which I Go to Find My Inheritance

IT was just a year—to a day—from the date of our happiest beach picnic that summer (the picnic when Pippy Crane let her warm, competent hand lie under mine on the firm sand, all through the endless verses of that absurdly haunting song wherein we explained to each other how, when, where and why we were “*seeing Nellie home*”); just one year, exactly, and I was tramping the deck of what we called “a great ocean liner” in those unsophisticated times.

There was, to be sure, a difference between this boat and the one that had brought me to America. It was bigger, it travelled faster, and there was a little more ceremony observed as to the serving of meals and the order of the day, generally. But we still felt conscious of taking a great step, and were distinctly brothers in adventure, and consequently friendly, *a priori*. And we still wore our oldest clothes (even older than we kept for travelling, when we “got there”—oh, yes, madam!), and those of us who were male assumed yachting caps, and those of us who were female presented a vastly different appearance from the dashing young person nominally under Hux’s authority, whom Aunt Chrissy “went in” to “see off” the other day. Indeed, that oldest girl of Huxley’s has a vastly different appearance, generally, from the *strong-minded* type of the early ’80’s.

“Strong-minded and well-dressed, eh?” says our grateful friend of the many motors (who took me to see old

I GO TO FIND MY INHERITANCE

Diana, you remember). "Oh! well, God help the men, that's all!"

The reason for my being on this "great ocean liner" (with due apologies to the *Mauretania*) was not at all what you may have supposed. In my last year at Crane's an English boy had come to the academy to be fitted for Yale, the son of a Londoner who had drifted to Canada, in the typical English fashion, liked it, formed business connections in the States, grew enthusiastic over the American business methods (so pleasant, when one profits by them!) and decided to bring his boy up to be an out-and-out Yankee. The boy's name was, oddly enough, Gordon Hughes, and such a coincidence, plus the fact that he was a pleasant fellow enough, and had travelled more than the rest of us, which made his talk interesting, drew us together, and he became one of that little coterie at the university that Bert made so famous. He was twenty-one that summer, and very proud of his father's confidence in entrusting him with some private commissions in London, besides the duty of looking up various god-parents and grandmothers and such like in the provinces.

"Why don't you come along, too, Hughie?" he had suggested (we were always "Hughie" and "Hughesy" to each other and the boys had taken it up). "Wouldn't your governor allow it? Mine told me I could take any one of the fellows along—granny's so used to a lot of fellows, you know; I've eight uncles—and my aunt wants to see a real Yankee boy. Wouldn't you like it?"

Wouldn't I? I'd ask the Doctor. He'd know about the money. And as to the absurdity of my being a representative Yankee boy, you must believe that it never struck me!

The Doctor agreed heartily with Aunt Addie that it

THE INHERITANCE

would be a fine chance for me, and personally lugged down from the attic his great bag (did we call it a "Gladstone" then? I think so), and said that my allowance would cover it, he was sure, only no nonsense, mind, for I was no Crœsus.

"Oh, no, of course not," I said vaguely (you must remember that I got my allowance cheque every month, with the other boys, and endorsed it, like them, in much the spirit of Elijah endorsing the ravens' performances).

Later he called me into the office and handed me a slip of much-figured paper.

"I know you're pretty steady, Hugh, so I don't mind showing you this: you'll see you really have 'more than we thought—I don't see why you shouldn't run into a thousand dollars for the trip, if you want to travel a little. Or even more. Things might come up, you know."

Oh, yes, things might come up. I agreed with him thoroughly.

"And as Addie says, you could lay in some clothes. There's no doubt they're cheaper, and she says they're better. I don't know much about that.

"You see, Hugh" (how sweet that deprecating, quizzical smile of his was! Hux had it, a little, and I think that was why I almost liked Hux); "you see, I'm no business man, this way. The only thing I ever had a particle of money-sense about is real estate. I must say I have a nose for that! But when I took over your affairs I let that bank at Hartford manage it, more or less. It was just the monthly cheque and your expenses, you know. And so, I just drew on the account, instead of Nana. You always appear to be solvent. . . ."

His smile saddened, and I knew by that almost uncomfortable telepathy that afflicts (and blesses) families, that

I GO TO FIND MY INHERITANCE

he was thinking of poor Bert. Ah, well, it takes all sorts to make a world, as Nana used to say; and that, like many and many a cant phrase, is the very bedrock of truth, when you brush away the cobwebs that custom has staled it with. We know nothing of any other sort of world, after all, do we? And yet we act and talk as if there were some one, really normal sort of person, one clear type, as describable as a "mammal," say, or a "vertebrate"!

"It looks to me as if Nana must have saved a good deal in those first years," said the Doctor thoughtfully, "and, of course, she could have. She was a great manager. By the way, have you told her you're going?"

No, I hadn't thought of it. But she'd soon be "up at the house," probably, though of course she didn't come nearly as much as she used, and of course she'd be delighted. Being English, herself, you know.

"Ye-es," the Doctor agreed doubtfully. "But you know you're English, too, Hugh."

I smiled, and said I knew it, but I never felt so, somehow, and he nodded and looked thoughtful again.

"It would be pretty hard—on us all—if you had to go back there, after all, wouldn't it, Hughie?" he said suddenly.

"Go back? But I wouldn't, I won't!" I cried. "Why, who could make me, Doctor?"

"Well, I don't know . . . there might be some inheritance business . . . well, we'll know very soon. Of course, there's no use pretending that your guardians over there, whoever they may be, have any particular affection for you, Hugh. Evidently there's no pretence of it. There's plenty of money, and it's paid regularly, and that's all. With both parents dead—you never even saw your mother, I understand?"

THE INHERITANCE

"No, Doctor."

"Nor your father?"

I shook my head.

"And not even any report demanded of your health or progress or studies—Addie tells me there's never been, and certainly there hasn't been since I signed the quarterly receipts—it looks as if what relatives there were were only interested in bare justice. Now, of course, with everything as open and aboveboard as it is, and the solicitor I deal with *who* he is—he's Geddie, you know, handles all Professor Vereker's wife's business: Vereker can't speak too highly of him—and with Nana *what* she is and so devoted to your family, why, of course, we know that everything's . . . oh, well, it's not the American way of doing things, certainly, but, as Addie says, there may be only too many reasons why you wouldn't be too welcome to whoever's holding your place till you're twenty-one, Hugh, my boy!"

The dear Doctor! There has never been a doubt in my mind that my adopted countrymen constitute the most romantic nation in the world.

"Of course, my boy," he went on, looking at me directly, "I wouldn't for the world force your confidence, and you may know more than I of your prospects—"

"Me, sir!" I cried eagerly, "why, I always supposed you and Aunt Addie knew more than I did! You know Aunt Addie always said that when I was twenty-one—"

"Yes, yes, I know," he interrupted hastily; "and I must tell you, my boy, that it's my belief your Aunt Addie thinks she knows more than she does! It's all come over me since this European trip of yours came up, somehow. To tell you the truth, Hugh, we none of us know anything, and that's the end of it. Nana is the

I GO TO FIND MY INHERITANCE

only one that knows, and her instructions are evidently—perfect silence. As Addie says (how we all fell back on Aunt Addie, try how we might!) it's more than likely that the whole allowance ceases if the conditions are broken—don't you see?"

I nodded comprehensively.

We both looked very wise, but how we could have explained the equity of this arrangement, outside of a melodrama, passes my comprehension, to-day! Although, to do him justice, some inkling of this must have come over the Doctor's mind, for he added musingly:

"And, I must say, it would have been highly irregular and dangerous to have trusted so young a child, with such prospects, to any ordinary servant, Hugh. I must say that. But as Addie points out, any arrangement sanctioned by Geddie, is, of course . . . indicates that . . . well, they knew Nana thoroughly, of course. Eighteen years in the family, as she admitted to Addie. And as your Aunt Addie puts it, any one who has lived as long in London as she has, knows the character of Geddie's clients. That alone, as she says . . . "

"Of course," I said briefly, trying to speak maturely and not to show how curiously excited and stirred I was, all at once. The consciousness of a family solicitor whose very name was a Rock of Gibraltar of importance and definite position, known to many, and making my small affairs important and definite, and known to many, in their turn, utterly aside from my personality, rushed over me, and I became from that moment like a girl that has once been loved, or a lad that has lost his first innocence, never the same again. Even the well-known fact of Nana's allegiance took on, of a sudden, a new light to my opened eyes.

"Eighteen years in the family!"

THE INHERITANCE

That she had been eighteen years in *my* service, was of course, but eighteen years *in the family!* Such feudalism was not, in South Warwick, in the '80's.

"And then, of course, one must remember," the Doctor went on, thinking backward, "that you came to us so soon that Nana really had the entire responsibility only a very little while."

"Of course," I murmured again. O Aunt Addie, Aunt Addie! Who brought Nana and me to "us"? Tell me that!

"And I hope, Hugh, my boy," the Doctor concluded, rising from his leather pivot chair and holding out his hand, "I hope you feel that we've done our best by you—however things may turn out. It's hard to realise that you're not one of my own boys: I wish you were."

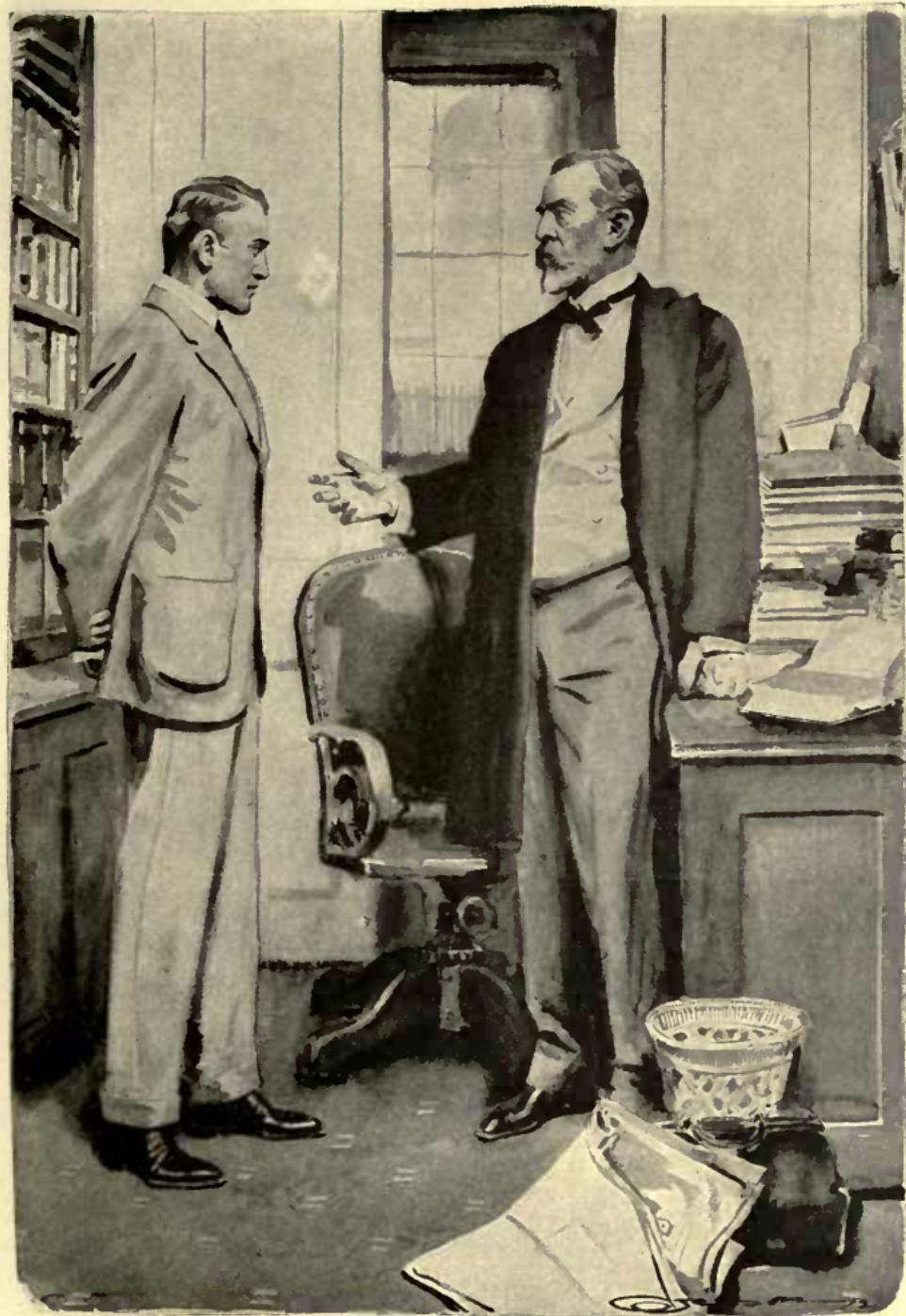
"Th-thank you, Doctor," I stammered briefly. I could say no more, for I found my lips were twitching, but we took hands tightly, and no son of his father's loins could have felt more than I felt at that moment, I'll swear, for the Doctor.

He blew his nose abruptly and sat down again.

"That's all, I think, then," he said, with the shyness Americans always have at such points, "except that I think I ought to remind you, Hugh, not to think of hunting Geddie up. I understand from Addie that any attempts of that sort must wait, for a year and a half. After that, of course——"

"Oh, after that . . ." I repeated, pursing my lips in a manner calculated to win even Mr. Geddie's well-weighed approval, "after that . . ."

I went out in a sort of dream, and amazed Chrissy, coming in for her nightly Dickens, by calling her "little woman" and remarking that "we were growing fast,



“I hope you feel that we've done our best by you.”

I GO TO FIND MY INHERITANCE

these days!" It seemed to me I was of another generation, simply. It was as if I felt another and older civilisation in my blood; thicker-layered, deeper-rooted, with winding, cross-currents running far underground (mixed metaphors, these!) quite unknown to the simple, open-book life of this community of no privacies. I felt, suddenly, what the Professor meant when he insisted that every one in America was like every one else. My school fellows, now: any one of their lives was the pattern of the others. Who of them had my sealed history? No open book there!

Little turns of speech of Aunt Addie, dropped on stony ground, took root and flowered all at once.

"But of course in Hugh's case, it's different. . . . I don't know if that would be suitable for Master Hugh, Nana? . . . Nonsense, Robert and Huxley, Hugh has always had a room to himself! . . . Now, my dear Hugh, don't, whatever you do, neglect your French—you may live to regret it bitterly, some day!"

And so on, and so on . . . I seemed to see, darkly, as in a glass, what she meant, now. And it stirred my blood and clouded my brain and set my heart a-tingle for that ocean liner!

Nana didn't happen to drop in for some time, for South Warwick was thick in plans for its new hospital, and she was in the very centre of it all, trying from her vast experience of ways and means to make out a budget of possible running expenses, and laying personal levies upon all the linen and bedding and sick-room supplies of the village. You see, in those benighted days there was no science of abstract efficiency, no college of comprehensive domestic economy, where learned chits instructed weary matrons by the book. No: in those dark ages of your country, dear madam, only those were supposed to

THE INHERITANCE

know life who had lived, and the ships of domestic state had women of a "certain age" at the helm.

But on a hurried visit to the Doctor who, with herself, really formed what we had learned to call the "head centre" of the hospital board, she took the occasion to welcome me back from college, and learned the great news.

We agreed that she seemed very quiet about it, and that her "Yes, indeed, Master Hugh, 'twill make a fine change for you," hardly met the occasion.

"And I've shown him how rich he is, Nana; he's so prudent, I'm sure it was all right," said the Doctor jokingly.

"Have you, then, Dr. Caldwell? I doubt he's none too rich for his needs," she said briefly, and I caught a glance from Aunt Addie to her brother that flushed me nervously.

"Well, well, young birds must try their wings," he said, "and Hugh's to go as much over a thousand dollars on the way to—well, say five hundred more, as he thinks he needs. He's never once gone over his allowance, Nana, and that would leave his next two years all safely provided for, besides the nest egg."

"Anything you say, Dr. Caldwell," she agreed gravely; "you and Master Hugh'll do what's right between you, no fear."

"And, by the way," said the Doctor in a low voice, as she followed him into the office, "I gave Hugh a hint about not disturbing Mr. Geddie—the solicitor, you know. I understand it is necessary under the terms of the . . . that is to say, he's to wait until he's of age, before we . . ."

"It has always been so meant, sir," she answered simply.

I GO TO FIND MY INHERITANCE

Truly, as Mr. Applegate never tired of saying, my old nurse was a remarkable woman!

Did she know where she was sending me—to what? If I had stopped to think, I must have realised that she was the only soul this side of the Atlantic who could have known; if I had stopped to think, I might have wondered at the quick flash of her eye, so soon veiled, and the strange yearning depth of her glance at her nurseling, her charge for so many faithful years, before he was “one of the Doctor’s boys.” But it was many years before I stopped to think.

CHAPTER XII

In Which I See Life

AS I look back on the three months that followed, it almost seems that I must be turning the pages of some brightly illustrated, gaily bound book, with a hero whose sprightly progress through the plot interests me indeed, but has no connection with me. Into the midst of my quiet, hard-working, and on the whole, responsible life, there bloomed this strange and startling flower, this exotic, heavy-scented growth of hot-houses whose like I shall never, probably, see again. Can I believe that I saw them really? Here in my comfortable study, I can close my eyes and make an effort of the will, and can see, behind my shut lids, the book-lined walls rise and spread and gleam with tooled morocco and aureate edges, and divide into embrasures for marble busts and ivory carvings, and veil their edges in wine-coloured velvet. My humble leather chairs turn into carved oak and tapestry; my man, who but now brought me in some logs from the stable, swells into a majestic, white-calved creature with a powdered head and divides into many of his kind; the rain trickling down the eave pipe is the fountain in the great conservatory that offers one door to this metamorphosed library, and the gentle echoes of a piano through two walls is the distant waltz from the great ballroom.

I am in twelve-guinea evening clothes with a white rose and a bit of maidenhair in my buttonhole, and the

I SEE LIFE

feet that tap to the waltz measure are in trim, varnished pumps. And if I am a little flushed and if the waltz sings a little giddily in my young ears, am I the only youth that night in London of whom this can be said? For the hot mutton and iced water of Connecticut are far behind me now, and steadier heads than mine have capitulated to the Burgundy of that princely host of mine!

And, mark you (for this is the wonder of it all), no salmon in the sea, no hawk in the air, felt ever more at ease and accustomed in his element than I in this gilded whirl of London in the Season. If I had experienced any strangeness, any consciousness of another standard of living, it was not here, but in the noisy, comfortable, provincial house of Hughes' grandmother, whose married daughters managed the house for her and kept her (as she said, with a sly wink at me) from getting dull and prosy.

There were croquet and even archery contests (shades of the squash court, forgive these antediluvian lapses!) on that estate; there were fat ponies and sleek bays, and a grapery, and friendly, chattering girls in pink and blue —there was, from the South Warwick point of view, luxury and a notable ease of life. And yet, from the moment I paid off my cab at the door, saw my new leather box started up the side stairs, tossed away my cigarette and strolled out through the shrubbery, studying my new tweeds appreciatively and flicking my new flexible stick against my new straw hat (for I was new from top to toe), from that moment, I say, a faint, unclassified feeling that had lain dormant up till now, back, back in my brain, suddenly cleared into definite shape, and I knew that the attitude I was holding toward Hughesy and his happy, prosperous kin was—tolerance. Just that. Heaven

THE INHERITANCE

knows why, but, contrary to what you might expect, I didn't care a button what they might think of me, and I knew as soon as I had met them that they were not a little interested in what I thought of them.

"Heartily glad to see you, my boy, heartily!" cried an expansive Uncle Hughes, beaming at me over a dazzling white waistcoat, "been looking forward to it ever since you reached London, haven't we, mamma? Glad to show you any simple hospitality in our power—of course, we're plain people, you know, plain people! But I have a little claret I'd have warranted before you were born—ha! Girls, where are you? Here's Gordie's friend from the States—come, now, look alive! England's honour, you know—mustn't let the Yankee girls beat us!"

I bowed gravely. The girls were all blonde, and large and high coloured and their mammas and aunts were rustling and gold chained and bracelettted.

"It's very good indeed of you, Mr. Gordon, to give us a few days," said the principal mamma, "and I assure you we appreciate it: we know that your time here has many claims upon it, don't we, girls?"

Again I bow deprecatingly—"Not at all, oh, not in the least."

"Ah, but we know better, you see! Gordie couldn't but tell us. He was so surprised—he'd no idea you knew *anybody*, you see, anybody at all, to say nothing of . . ."

"Oh, bother it all, auntie, I say! Hughie's all right—if we're not grand enough for him he can cut away, that's all. Come on, Hughie, I think my nicest cousins are over on the croquet lawn."

Are you rubbing your eyes, O puzzled reader, at these unaccountable allusions? Do you detect in the simple British merchant a little tendency, not wholly absent from

I SEE LIFE

his ilk, whose *raison d' etre* you're at a loss to explain? To understand it, and me, at this stage, you must go back a little.

Professor Vereker had entrusted to me a certain very precious scarab, which was on no account to leave my person until I delivered it safely to another professor with an absolutely unpronounceable German name, at the British Museum. Dr. Crane's boys had a pretty fairly deserved reputation for useable German, and everything the Other Professor (as I invariably styled him) should answer to my list of questions—to be read from the paper—I was to copy faithfully and guard as the apple of my eye. The scarab was then to be carried to Major (now Colonel) Protheroe, at the Sirdar Club, with a letter of instructions and what he was to do with it in Egypt, where he was going in the autumn, only he and the Professor knew.

We stepped out into a bright London morning (at least, Hughesy assured me it was bright) and I, meekly piloted by his superior personality, listened respectfully to his careless information and thought myself very lucky to have such a friend at court. The smoky doors of the Sirdar received us, and we waited patiently among the filed Indian newspapers and somnolent old gentlemen who pretended to read them, absorbing toddies the while, staring curiously about us when the liveried pompositives were not looking, for I had never been in a club in my life.

Presently the Major (I couldn't think of him as Colonel) appeared, looking just as he looked eleven years ago, from my point of view, and the letter was delivered, the scarab entrusted, Hughesy introduced, and matters appeared to be concluded.

"Stop a bit," said the Colonel suddenly, looking over

THE INHERITANCE

his letter, "it's not possible that you are *that* little chap? Do you remember me?"

"Oh, yes, sir, quite well. I don't think you've changed, Maj—Colonel."

"God bless my soul! You and the puppy and the little girl—he? And I suppose she's grown, too?"

"Yes, sir. She's a great deal changed, too—her hair is very dark, now."

"Yes, yes—like her mother's. Is she—Mrs. Vereker—in the Bermudas now? Vereker writes she's gone home for a bit."

"Yes, sir. She's been there quite a while, now."

"Ah, yes. Yes, yes. . . ."

His eyes fixed themselves absently on me, under the bushy, gray brows, and he fell into a brown study.

A great handsome man, with iron-gray moustaches, shouldered by us and clapped the Colonel on the back.

"Morning, Prothy! Any news?"

"We're off by September—definitely."

"Hard luck! That's the second shooting you've missed, I think? Well, well, it's a dog's life, ain't it, Prothy?"

"Um," said the Colonel noncommittally. "Here, Stacey, see here, who do you think I've got here? Vereker's boy, from the States. You remember Eugenie La Febvre, of course?"

"Indeed I do. So this is her son? He doesn't look like her."

"No, no, God bless me! It was a girl. No, this is a ward of sorts—English lad, you see—inheritance business—stays over there till his majority—something like that, Gordon, eh? Lord, how it all comes back! I remember that day so plain . . . you were a little shaver, then, weren't you?"

"Yes, Colonel, about nine."

I SEE LIFE

"Miss La Febvre married a writing man, didn't she, Prothy? Scientific chap?"

"Yes; Vereker, the Egyptian authority, you know."

"Not *the* Vereker?"

"That's it. I've a scarab from him that's to go to Egypt (*entre nous*, of course) and upset all the previous evidences of—of *what* invasion is it, my boy?"

I disclaimed any responsibility for this terrible scarab, only adding modestly that its results were confidently expected to stagger the antiquarian world—which, as a matter of fact, I believe, they did, ultimately.

"Well, well, how the years go by!"

The Colonel puffed out a great sigh. "I never enjoyed a meal better than that cook of yours gave us, Gordon. Ever tried American lobster, Stacey? And that liqueur brandy . . . you must stop, my boy, and have a bit of luncheon with me. Talk over old times, eh?"

"No, no, Prothy, wait a bit and lunch with me; Paravale's coming in for his tailor—my son, you know (to me) and the two youngsters can hit it off together. I've just sent a saddle in from Staceways—very juicy, they tell me. Stop and try it—and your friend, if he will. . . ."

But Hughesy had to meet one of his principal uncles at *his* club, and excused himself. As he turned to go, regretfully, I thought, the big military shoulders of "Stacey" twisted about on his powerful trunk, and he summoned one of the pomposities.

"Tell the chef I shall have four, and I'll have some of that yellow-label of mine, will you?"

"Yes, my lord," said the pomosity bowing, and as I escorted Hughesy to the door, officially, we heard the pomosity murmur to one of his underlings:

THE INHERITANCE

"Look sharp, now—Lord Stacey's mutton for four and the yellow label at the usual table."

"Whew! You *are* going it, aren't you?" and I felt a knowing nudge at my elbow.

"Am I?" I said innocently; "it was kind of the Major, wasn't it?"

"Oh, I dare say," and Hughesy gave me an odd, respectful sort of glance. For, you see, I was perfectly unconscious, and that made all the difference. I had never met a lord, to be sure, but then, I had never met a queen, or an earl, or an archangel. And I had read about them all, and "yes, my lord," sounded just as it looked in the novels. It was all a sort of play to me, and I was only Master Hugh, after all.

Later, as I discussed the Staceways' excellent Southdown, opposite a strapping young fellow whose name appeared to be Patty (he called his father *pater*, just as they did in the novels), Lord Stacey looked at my full glass and pursed his lips in mock solicitude.

"Not up to your famous liqueur brandy, eh?" he said. "I'm afraid your people spoiled the Colonel here."

"Oh, no, no, sir," I stammered, gulping at it, "it's not that, but I'm not used to wine, so very much. I'm sure it's delicious."

"Couldn't please me better, my boy," he answered approvingly. "It's best saved till later, in my way of thinking. Wish you'd get Patty with you, there! Hey, Pat?"

"Oh, come, now, guv'nor," drawls Pat; "how about 'Four Bottle Harry' at Trinity?"

And the old fellows laugh heartily and ask me my plans.

"For Pat might show you about a bit, if you're not too busy."

No, I wasn't busy. I had thought of hunting out a

I SEE LIFE

tailor my aunt knew of, if my friend Mr. Hughes had time. . . .”

“Just going to my own—rather decent fellow—glad to take you, if you like,” says Patty; “shall we start?”

“That’s right, that’s right, and why not come to us for a bit when Prothy’s with us—Lady Stacey knew your mother, I’m sure—didn’t she, Prothy?”

“Yes, indeed, at Bermuda—— God bless my soul, Stacey, this isn’t Eugenie’s boy, you know—hers was a girl. This is the little ward-in-chancery boy—stopping with them, you know. Vereker’s much attached to him—all that sort of thing. The girl’s in his guardian’s family, I believe, while her mother’s away—that it, my boy?”

“Yes, sir, Chrissy’s with us all the time, now.”

“Oh, well, it’s all the same—call a cab, Biggestow, for the young gentlemen (Yes, my lord), and, Pat, your mother expects you for dinner in the country, you know.”

“Yes, pater.”

“Taffy isn’t quite the thing, this season, so we left town early, you know, Prothy, and the women all like it so much, by Gad, they don’t even come in for the balls.”

“All the same, guv’nor, keep your eye on the Filly Thursday fortnight, at *our* ball!” quoth Patty sagely; “you’ll find her ‘quite the thing,’ then, I fancy. Now, if you’re ready, Gordon. . . .”

I can see that tailor, now: his manners made a far greater impression upon me than Lord Stacey’s.

“One’s always taking fellows to tailors that’ve just come back home,” Pat vouchsafes. “Queer, after he’s seen his people, first place a fellow makes for. A cousin of mine had a ranch near you, somewhere, and he always laid in a stock, first thing.”

“A ranch near me?”

THE INHERITANCE

"Colorado, it was. Or are you in the Southern states? They're off Bermuda, aren't they?"

I gasped.

"I'm near New York," I said gravely; "there aren't many ranches there."

"I'd give my hat to go there," says Pat gloomily; "but I suppose I'll have to stick by the ship. Two of my brothers—Lionel and Jerry—are going out to my cousin next year. He has eight thousand sheep. Ever met him—Bellew Stacey: tall, dark chap?"

"N-no. I never went West, Lord Parravale."

"Oh, chuck it—call me Pat, won't you? You know the *pater* was sweet on your mother once, don't you? The way I know, he was joking the old Colonel about it—oh, ages ago, when I was a little chap in knickers. He'd just been to the States and seen her for a bit, you know, and they were all chaffing him, he was so down.

"'You've no right to nag me, Stace, old man,' he came out, all of a sudden, 'I've seen the poetry *you* wrote her!'

"Jove, wasn't there a howl!"

"But—but that wasn't *my*—"

"Hi! stop, you, cabby! You're 'way out—48, I told you, and here it is '79, and I'm late, as it is."

"Very sorry, sir. . . ."

I seem hopelessly entangled with the Verekers and have a feeling that I shall continue to be.

The manners of that tailor, so unlike any tailor I ever knew, placed me in utter subjection to them, and I stood in a tremour of uncertainty as to the proper things to do and say to him and his assistant. From the moment when he bowed to us, accepted the fact of my existence, and expressed himself as enchanted to serve any friend of Lord Parravale's, I was as wax in his hands.

I SEE LIFE

"William, oblige me by assisting Mr. Hughes-Gordon with his coat—thank you. William, will you kindly bring those sample light-weight tweeds to Lord Parravale's friend? William, kindly record these measures of Mr. Hughes-Gordon—and how does London appear to you, sir, after your long absence? Homelike, I trust? Many Colonial gentlemen have depended upon me for years, sir, and even in the event of the measures changing slightly (as they will, we all know) I have satisfied perfectly. What is it, William?"

For William was murmuring in subdued tones and pointing to my distinguished measurements under his breath, so to speak. There was a short colloquy.

"How many, er, to what extent was your friend thinking of ordering, my lord?"

"Why? What's up, Goodenow?"

"It's quite a coincidence, sir, but as I said to William (William, oblige me by sending inside for all of the Honourable Mr. Avesham's order), as I said, 'William, mark my words, there will be somebody come along that will be glad to get these, and a favor to the family, into the bargain.' But I never expected it so soon. You heard of poor Mr. Avesham's death, my lord?"

"Yes, indeed, poor beggar. Hard luck. Walked out of a third-story window in his sleep, three days before his wedding, Gordon. Nice chap, I believe."

"Yes, sir. I've attended to the family since he went out of kilts, my lord. He had a fancy for everything new, do you see—some gentlemen have, and a good job for their valets, I assure you! I had his whole order here—they were going to Scotland. As William points out, the measures are identical with your friend's, sir,—identical—or as much as makes no matter in the trouser length; Mr. Avesham had a shade the longer leg, sir.

THE INHERITANCE

Naturally, the family didn't want to see them. Sir Blessington Avesham forbade me to allow his mother to know about them, and I told him to leave everything here, and I'd make such an offer to any gentleman as could use them, as to dispose of them quick, and only recoup myself to the extent of the actual cloth and the making. Would you care to see them, sir?"

William appeared, staggering under garments, a laden underling in the rear.

"Don't look alarmed, sir, it's the Inverness that bulks so. There were three lounge suits and a frock and the evening clothes and the riding breeches and the heavy morning tweeds and the flannels—two, he was a cricketer, you'll remember, my lord—the light overcoat and the smoking jacket. That large box the boy has was the body linen. All sent here to be marked. The shirts, the very best. The scarfs he picked out the last thing, from the shop below. He'd a new box—it's in the cutting room—and it was sent here for his man to pack, for we were late with the Inverness. Yes, and a new silver cigarette case that he'd specially fancied and picked out in Bond Street, it seems, and sent over for us to cut a special pocket for, for he fancied the size—a little large, you see, sir. The bill came with it . . . I'd be delighted to make you a price, sir, and Lord Parravale will assure you that you'll get your money's worth."

"Great chance, I should say," said Lord Parravale promptly; "why don't you try one on?"

"Would you care to try the linen, sir? None of it's marked."

I followed William's respectful becks and nods into a private room and emerged in a few moments, a little diffident, but perfectly conscious of a highly satisfactory result. The cool grey garments of the Honourable Mr.

I SEE LIFE

Avesham might have been cut and fitted and sewed with my proportions in careful view.

"And the hips just takes up that length in the leg, you see, William!"

"It's a marvel," vouchsafed William succinctly.

"And you're dressed for two years, easy, sir. . . . I would make it (for a friend of yours, Lord Parravale), let me see. . . ."

I had known from the beginning that I should take them.

"Suppose I give you a draft for fifty pounds," I began.

"Oh, my dear sir—don't think of it—at your leisure—Oh, certainly, if you prefer. But pray don't hurry about the balance! And the boxes, sir, I'll send . . . you'll find the cigarette case a neat thing, and distinguished, I think—out of the ordinary. Oh, yes, my lord, Colonial gentlemen and from America invariably have a great deal of money by them. And pay very largely. I've often remarked it. Very free they are. They do business in a large way, I suppose."

I could see that Pat was impressed, though he tried to hide it with an offhand manner, and insisted on presenting me with a malacca stick from the shop below, "for a wedding present"—a callous young thing, Pat! I purchased a new straw hat, too, and some grey gloves, and strode out into the glimmering London sunshine, for the first time in my life, a very glass of fashion.

We took a new hansom and rode idly along to the Park, linked into a strange, factitious intimacy through this sudden larkish purchase of my *trousseau*, as Pat persisted in calling it; and we got buttonholes from a red-cheeked flower girl; and Pat bowed left and right; and I could not help thinking that the mammas and daughters he bowed to looked at me, too, as they nodded. One of

THE INHERITANCE

the mammas signed to Pat with her parasol and told him to get her some tea, and he said, "Yes, Lady Kitty, if you'll give me a dance Thursday," and she laughed and called him a saucy infant and told him she had nearly been his godmother, which could hardly have been so, I thought, for she was so very beautiful.

We sat about a little table on the emerald turf, and Lady Kitty smiled frankly into my eyes, and told Pat to talk to her daughter Aileen, who was sixteen and even more beautiful than she, but very shy.

"I adore *Colonials*," said Lady Kitty, "they *do* things. Is your friend to be at the ball?"

"Sure to," said Pat, full of tea cake; "he's coming to Staceways before that, though. He don't know old Bellew, though. I don't believe old Bell's very popular, Lady Kitty; there's two Americans I know, now, and neither of 'em knows him. That man from New Orleans didn't, either."

It seemed to me that the world was one flood of *victorias* and satin-shining bays: I had never seen such horses. And such beautiful creatures leaned back behind them, framed in pale rosy and blue halves of parasols; such quiet, contented, distinguished men stood or sat at ease, punctuating this flower bed of femininity; such angelic blond children called to one another across the velvet turf in such lovely throaty voices. Ever since that day I always think of England as the land where it was always afternoon: against all my convictions and habits of life, there persists in my recollection of that lotus country the feeling that for such a gracious flowering of civilisation as Hyde Park, all the roots of England were planted! The great cruel mills; the wicked black mines; the desolation of other mean, unlovely towns; the horror of the slimy slums that fester at London's vitals; the sod-

I SEE LIFE

den, crippled drunkenness that trails through her arteries —all these seem a mere tangle of obscure worms beneath that jewel-like turf. Nay, in an epicure's conception, almost they richened the soil!

The glamour of that wonderful old England! She has not been kind to me, the Old Mother, and for a time, at least, I thought she had broken my heart, but even with her cruelty, I felt her charm, her depth, her many-sidedness. Her life is like one of those *galantines* she loves so: plunge down into the rich aspic at any point, and reach layer after layer of succulence, cross-currents of meaty surprises, at every plunge of the inquiring fork. And so it has always been that her gorgeous dandies lolling through the London afternoons invariably recall to me her Raleighs and all the Buccaneers; those somnolent old majors at the Sirdar bring up to my imagination the bronzed, hard-bitten men that hold all India in leash; the flushed and roystering collegians, foolish over the punch bowl at Christmas dances, you shall find sweating and dogged along the African veldt; and any one of those shy, cake-filled school boys, tow-headed and rough of tongue, may be another Shakespeare!

You see, now, I hope, why Uncle Hughes spoke as he did.

And when Hughesy called around at the quiet hotel in Russell Square to which Aunt Addie had sent me, to ask if I would come out to his uncle's that evening, I had to put off that pleasure because of a previous engagement to dine with Lady Kitty Vale-Griffiths at the Savoy.

"I say," observed Hughesy gravely, "but you *are* going it, you know! And look at our clothes! Who's our tailor?"

I told him, and he shook his head blankly.

THE INHERITANCE

"But there's where the swells go!" he cried. "By George, Hughie, you were a swell all the time, and never said so!"

Pat was to have dined with us, but at the last moment his mother wouldn't let him off, and I found myself at eight o'clock alone with the first lady who ever looked deep into my dazzled eyes over a franker expanse of creamy skin than I had dreamed a decent woman could face the world with. Two little wisps of pale, diaphanous stuff were evidently intended to answer for sleeves, and with each dip of her polished breast the old Vale sapphires winked and shot out their flames.

She had coils of blue-black hair, a dusky olive cheek, and deep violet, Irish eyes, with a little dancing devil in each of them. She had also a gambling old rake of a husband, to whom she had been sold at her daughter's age—sixteen—and no more sense of responsibility than a lovely panther.

Now I had never conceived the possibility of such feelings as Lady Kitty inspired in the breast of susceptible youth. I knew one felt so about girls, but in my experience, wives—and mothers—were quite out of the social and emotional question. And lo, it was so with me that Lady Aileen now appeared a raw young chit, best off in her nursery, and her mother that pillar of fire that guides each son of Adam, once at least in his life, through his *sturm und drang* in the desert!

"Lady Kitty's great fun," Pat had let fall casually, "and, my word, she's taken a fancy to you! There are *two* duels on her account *everybody* knows . . . they say young Goggy Gordon—Shropshire Gordons, you know—had to be sent to India on her account. By the by, they must be some of your people. Goggy's very fair, like

I SEE LIFE

you, and the chin's the same—I *knew* your face was natural, somehow."

Lord Stacey's yellow label still sang in my ears; I forgot my prudence; all the simple, unconscious, incurious reserve that I had grown up in seemed melting away from me in this warm, easy, friendly London, and a resentful disquiet welled up in its stead. What a ridiculous ignorance I had suffered—what a childish credulity!

"My people aren't any too anxious to claim me!" I muttered angrily, "but a man wants something more than an allowance, I can tell you, Parravale!"

"Oh, . . . I see, I see," he murmured reflectively, "Sir Wilkie's not yearning to take Colonials to his bosom, then, . . . well, that *is* hard luck, old fellow—I know his nibs, and he's the devil for family rows. All the same, blood's thicker than water, and I'd look 'em up, Gordon, and take the chances. Lady Grace is a trump—she's always patching up the shindies."

I grew confused, and made an honest effort to break through the webs that were set a-spinning round me.

"I ought to tell you, Lord Parravale," I began, "that as a matter of fact I am utterly ignorant of who——"

"O Lord, don't drag me into it!" he burst out. "The fact is, Gordon, I'm supposed to be more or less tied up with Joan, the daughter, you know, and though it's nothing formal, in fact—well, there's nothing, really—I haven't seen the girl for five years—but the mater and Lady Grace are keen on it, don't you know, and I don't say it won't be. So there's no good *my* taking sides. I don't doubt you're in the right—Colonel Protheroe told my father you were as fine a fellow as ever stepped—he knows all about it, of course."

"There's one person that *does* know all about it," I

THE INHERITANCE

said thickly, "and that's Mr. Geddie—I'll know what *he* has to say before I'm much older!"

"Oh, Geddie!" says Pat, relieved; "if old Geddie's managing, you're all right, no fear. He does all our business—don't bother, now, but be guided by Geddie, Gordon. Just leave it to him. Why, the pater says Geddie's patched up more families than any man in London. And I'll have a go at Lady Grace, if you like—Gad, you'll be late—you've hardly time to change, and I'll never get to Staceways for dinner."

I rose in haste, and signalled a cab as unconsciously as if I had summoned those useful vehicles for a decade.

"And to think we never knew that one of 'em went to the Bermudas!" mused Pat; "I'll wager Joan and Taffy haven't an inkling! There was that bad egg of a Sir Hugo, though, they never mention—maybe it was he. . . . Gad, I believe it must have been he! He was the Baronet when I was a kiddie—Oh, my dear fellow, my dear Gordon, I beg your pardon! I didn't realize, on my honour . . . please forget it!"

Sir Hugo! Sir Hugo! Something seems to take shape, tantalisingly, in my clouded brain, then fade again. What was that I seemed to grasp?

"Never mind, never mind," I mutter vaguely.

"And Goggy's called for him, you know, anyway—at least, I suppose so," Pat extenuates, "though of course it's more than likely it's just a family name—like yours, you know. But you won't mind my remembering that Sir Wilkie was awfully bitter; I happen to know, because I was asking Goggy, once, years ago, if he was named for Victor Hugo, and he told me there was a row on with his uncle. His father was probably awfully prejudiced."

"We'll see about all this later, Parravale," I said briefly; "it's—it's what I've come over for."

I SEE LIFE

And suddenly I saw that what I had said was true!

So, even as I laughed back at the little sapphire devils in Lady Kitty's eyes and wondered why it was that I had been possessed of the silly idea that women with grown daughters couldn't, *a priori*, be fascinating, even then, I say, my brain, incredibly dormant, it seemed, till now, galvanised and threw off brilliant, vivid sparks, and whizzed as it whirled about in my head.

Sir Hugo! *Sir Hugo!* "Fair like me, with the same chin." And I had been buried sixteen years in Warwick!

"Stupid that Patty couldn't come," Lady Kitty was saying, "isn't it? Grace Stacey is rather a cat, sometimes. She seems to think I should *bite* Pat!"

"But you wouldn't, I'm sure."

"Oh, no; I'd not *bite* him!"

"You'll make me jealous of Pat, Lady Kitty!"

"O-o-oh! And one hears of 'shy Colonials'! Never mind, you're a dear boy yourself, Mr. Gordon, a very dear sort of boy. I shouldn't dare to tell you what an attractive boy you were—but no doubt you've been told so too often for your own good."

"No—on my honour, I haven't! Tell me!"

"As if I would! (No, indeed, no more for me. Well, only a pint, then!) But, seriously, I don't mind telling you one thing. You're rather like another dear boy that—that used to be fond of me . . . "

"When?"

"Oh, ages ago—six months, then. Your chin—that little, square cleft—exactly like his."

"You mean Goggy?" I ask quickly.

"Why, yes—how did you know? Do you know Goggy? Why, to be sure, you're a Gordon, too!"

"Yes, I'm a Gordon, too," I repeat bitterly.

"And your eyes! That same green that's really blue

THE INHERITANCE

—*glaueque*, you know, and the lashes so dark . . . I *knew* there was something! But coming from America, I never thought! Why didn't Patty say something about it—I thought he'd just met you to-day."

"He had."

"Oh! . . . But—but I thought they were all girls, the rest of the Gordons? How interesting! And Sir Wilkie's father—the old Baronet—surely he was the only son. Why, yes, because, when poor old Hugo went to the bad, everybody said it was old Sir Doric's fault for breaking the Gordon rule and having more than one son—don't you know?"

"No, I don't know. I'm a stranger here, Lady Kitty."

"Like your motto—'*A Stranger, but still a Gordon.*' And that's what you are, aren't you, Mr. Gordon? I suppose you've come over here to 'trace it up,' as the Yankees say? I met a man at your Ambassador's once, who told me that he owned the city of Leeds, really; his name was Ingraham. But he called it In-gra-ham—like that."

"Yes. I've come to trace it up."

"How serious we are! Only don't disinherit poor Goggy, will you—where did you meet him? He never was in Bermuda—you're from Bermuda, I think? Only poor Hugo was there—when he was Sir Hugo. What's your name, Mr. Gordon?"

"Hugh."

"Hugh? Why, how strange! How very . . . Why, who *are* you, Mr. Hugh Gordon?"

There is but one answer to this blunt question, but I do not make it.

"I will tell you some other time, later, Lady Griffiths."

"(Vale-Griffiths, my child.) But . . . but . . . I

I SEE LIFE

don't want to seem impertinent, dear Mr. Gordon, only—your eyes and your chin, you know. It's not possible that . . . Oh, it can't be!"

The wine, the lights, the low clink and rustle and murmur of a well-fed English roomful, the glistening shoulders, the arch eyes of jewelled women turned so often and so unmistakably on our table (for Lady Kitty and I were quite alone), the men who rose, serviette in hand, stood so stiffly and bowed so ceremoniously when they caught a glance of my *vis-a-vis*, the delicate, wonderful food—is it any wonder that between the boy of yesterday and to-day a great gulf suddenly stretched?

I leaned toward her and tapped the shining damask slowly.

"More things are possible than you or your friends suspect," I said, under my breath.

The little devils gleamed no longer in her eyes. Only a keen, serious interest was in them, as they met my own squarely.

"Do you mean—do I understand you to say, that Hugo had another son—in Bermuda? That he married there?"

"I say nothing," I muttered thickly, "I only said I'd tell you another time. Remember, I say nothing."

"Because it's quite possible, of course," she went on, utterly ignoring my last speech. "And it would be just like Hugo. Old Cecil Vale always said there was something or other hushed up, about Hugo. He said once—I remember it perfectly well—'Grace Gordon will have hard work quieting *that* business down, I'll wager!' And when I said what business, he only answered, 'Oh, just a little more of that precious Hugo's devilry, my dear, that's all! Ten to one, he's fooled them at Hopestairs, any way.' Tell me, *did* he fool them?"

My head rang.

THE INHERITANCE

"I say nothing! Mind you, I say nothing!" I repeated mechanically.

"You may say nothing, dear Mr. Gordon, but your chin says volumes," she answered quickly. "Tell me only this—who was your mother?"

The room was a bright blur.

"I don't know," I said, and my voice seemed another man's voice, "she died when I was a baby."

"But—but your name . . . *Gordon* . . . ?"

"Oh, yes," I answered bitterly, "it's my name all right enough, Lady Kitty—I've seen my mother's wedding ring."

"Ah!" she said thoughtfully, "it's very curious."

My mind went back like lightning to the incident of the wedding ring; I had been rummaging through Nana's bureau for toffee, which she made me on rainy days, and had brought to the surface a little carved wooden box such as one buys at the Swiss resorts, from which, as I pried into it, there fell a broad gold ring, a straight band with a black enamel pattern around it in the Greek-key style.

"What's this, Nana?" I asked, "why don't you wear it?"

"It's your mother's wedding ring, lovey," she answered, after a long pause, "and Nana's saving it to give to you when you're twenty-one."

At that she burst into a passion of tears, which alarmed me terribly, and I begged her to stop.

"Did you love her so much?" I queried, when she was calm again, "were you so sorry that—that she——"

"God help me, but I doubt I loved her too well!" she said in a whisper. "But put by the thought of it, lambie, I've done the best I could. And when you're a man grown, you must do the rest yourself."

I SEE LIFE

"Anyway, I like your ring the best," I said comfortingly, and she smiled wanly and twisted her own rounded gold circlet about her roughened finger.

"Eh, but it's been of more service to me than ever hers was to her!" she said, very low, and put back the enamelled one into the box.

Under the spell of the memory I found myself telling Lady Kitty the incident, and from then on it needed but little urging to get from my crowded boy's heart all that was in it. Before our coffee was cool for drinking, Lady Vale-Griffiths knew all of my life that I did, and guessed more, as I very soon saw.

"Twenty years—twenty years ago," she murmured, pressing her lovely ringed hands over her eyes. "Why, surely, that was when poor old Hugo came back from Bermuda. . . .

"Yes. I was nearly thirteen, and I heard Aunty scolding about it to Sir Patrick.

"'Grace may regret the day she refused Sir Hugo,' Aunty said, 'for all she counts on his never marrying again. Hugo never kept a promise yet, and you'll see he'll be up with a son and heir just as poor Wilkie Gordon expects it least. Hugo's not dead yet,' says she."

"Then, Sir Hugo was married?"

"Goodness, yes; didn't you know? oh, no, you don't know anything. Well, he married a sort of person—oh, well, she was impossible, but she *was* married, it couldn't be denied."

"A sort of person," I prompted.

"What was she, now? We all knew all about it, of course, and especially me, because Aunty would have married me to him in a minute, do you see, if I'd been but three years older!"

"What!"

THE INHERITANCE

“Oh, yes, he was ages older than me, but he always admired me, poor old Hugo.

“‘You hurry and grow, and I’m hanged if I don’t marry you, Kitty-cat,’ he used to say, ‘marry and settle down, eh?’ And give the horridest wink—ugh, I couldn’t bear Sir Hugo then. But he wasn’t so bad when he wasn’t tipsy.”

“Whom did you say he married?”

“She was—oh, yes, she was the daughter of a chemist out Euston way, somewhere. Her father brought him out of *delirium tremens* one day and kept him in his house, over the shop, and she took care of him. Of course, that was enough for Hugo. I remember as well as can be when Sir Patrick came stamping into the schoolroom where Aunty was watching my drawing lesson (the teacher used to make love to me, I’m sorry to say) and burst out with the news.

“‘Well, it’s all over,’ he said, perfectly furious, ‘that ass of a Hugo’s done it now.’

“‘Another *affaire*?’ says Aunty—‘remember the child, Patrick.’

“‘Pah!’ says Uncle, ‘it’s worse than that, Biddy—this time he’s *married* her!’

“And it was true: Lady Emma Gordon she was, and poor Grace cried her eyes out, nearly; she was twenty, and Joan was just born—she wants to marry Pat to Joan, you know. Nobody’s seen Joan for five years, since she went to the *Sacré Cœur* in Tours. If you cut Pat out at the ball—it’s her coming-out, you know, Grace will never forgive you, for her heart is set on it.”

“Is Lady Emma——”

“Dead, a long time. More than sixteen years, it must be, for they didn’t come to my wedding, for their deep

I SEE LIFE

mourning. *Mon Dieu*, I had better have worn mourning myself, *n'est ce pas?*"

I scowled. Patty had told me a few facts about the aristocratic Vale-Griffiths.

"Between his never being sober, and her such a—oh, she was simply impossible! Anyway, people weren't any too cordial (he was very trying to have in one's house, because he was always after the maid-servants—poor, dreadful old Hugo—and of course the woman hadn't a shred of influence over him), so when his lungs went bad and they got him off to the Bermudas, it was a great relief. He'd just got into another mess of some sort—I didn't know much about it, but with Hugo it was always the one thing: women—and poor Grace Gordon had to literally hold Wilkie away from his brother, they say. She settled everything (that was what Lord Cecil said Grace would have hard work quieting), but she did it, and got him and Lady Emma off—there was some brother that threatened to kill him, I believe—poor Hugo always found the brothers troublesome!"

"Lady Emma—Lady Senna, we all called her, *à cause de papa*—died in childbirth, and Hugo came back to Hopestairs with the body. He looked terribly old and broken, and never seemed the same.

"'Have it your own way, Grace and Wilkie,' he said, 'I'll trouble you no more,' and he kept his word for once. Lord Cecil said it took ten years off them when he died."

"Off whom?"

"Why, Grace and Wilkie, stupid. So Wilkie got the baronetcy. And if poor Hugo's boy and Lady Senna's hadn't died before it was born, where would Grace and Wilkie have been? Grace said it made one believe in religion, after all. That was all about twenty years ago."

THE INHERITANCE

Something seemed closing, weaving all around me; I dreaded I knew not what.

"Twenty years?" I said mechanically, "twenty years? Why, I am nearly twenty-one years old . . . "

Lady Kitty smiled mockingly. "Do you begin to see, then?" she whispered, leaning till her white breast touched her coffee cup, "do you see why it was worth their while to pay so well? Not Grace, I will say for her, she'd not dare; for all she's a bit of a cat, she's good enough. But Wilkie—heavens, there's nothing on earth that man wouldn't do! And with Gideon Geddie to help him—I tell you Wilkie Gordon has no limits!"

"You mean that I—that my mother—that I am really—"

"I mean that what your mother couldn't do for you, Mr. Hugh Gordon, what your father was too weak to stand up for, your old nurse tried to fight for, that's what I mean. Till she was starved out of it. What was her name?"

"Nana?" I was utterly dazed. "I don't—oh, of course. It was Esther Palse."

"Then that was that maid of Lady Senna's—old Salsypalsy, Hugo used to call her. She was a kind of relative, in service, and poor Senna had to have somebody she could talk to! She used to keep her in her room to give it to Hugo, when he drank. Salts-and-Senna, everybody called them."

"Then you think that S—"

"I think, *cher enfant*," she put out her warm white hand and I grasped it feverishly. We were almost alone in the room, for everyone had gone on to the play or the ball.

"I think, Monsieur Innocence, that Master Goggy is—just Master Hugo Gordon, the son of a younger son,

I SEE LIFE

(poor old Wilkie!) and that you are . . ." she smiled into my eyes, prolonging my torture.

"Oh, no! Oh, no!" I muttered; but all the while I knew that I thought with her, and longed to hear her say it.

"Come and take me to my carriage, *Sir Hugh!*" she whispered, and I rose and gave her my arm, and we passed out between the lines of bowing waiters.

CHAPTER XIII

In Which I Glimpse My Inheritance

AT Lady Kitty's advice I took no official steps in the direction of Gideon Geddie, both because he was found to be on his holiday, which he passed, like all good Britons, in sunny France, and because she judged it better that I should make friends before I made revelations. In France, too, were Sir Wilkie and Lady Grace, travelling a little with their daughter, Joan, before they brought her home to bring her "out," a phrase which I had heretofore connected entirely with fiction. (In South Warwick, when our young ladies lengthened their skirts and raised their hair, they were, *ipso facto*, "out," and they were never very much "in," anyhow.)

"Just go about with Patty," counselled Lady Kitty, "and then when the row is on, you'll have all his set to back you. Patty's none too attached to Sir Wilkie, though he's awfully fond of Lady Grace; if he does marry Joan, it will be just to please her."

"I should like to catch myself marrying for such a reason," I said hotly.

"Oh, you'll have your pick, *mon cher*, or I'm much mistaken," she said meaningly. I looked straight into her yielding eyes.

"It is quite unlikely that *I* should marry—for some time," I said slowly, and I had the satisfaction of seeing her eyelids fall. She had captured me absolutely, this lovely panther, and at her nod I would have proclaimed

I GLIMPSE MY INHERITANCE

my identity from the top of St. Paul's or guarded it forever in my heart.

Love's instinct taught me that she liked me best when I was most like the lads of my age with whom Patty's friendship threw me, and truly, I doubt if any stranger could have selected, in a week's time, from that crew of invincible young *élégants*, the simply bred Yankee!

Dr. Caldwell had given me, as a matter of course, drafts on my entire little property, for my well-known conservatism in money matters would have made this a reasonable course in the eyes of a more suspicious guardian; and his simple mental picture of an untravelled boy guided by a middle-class merchant's son through the obvious sight-seeing of the metropolis would have vastly entertained the placid young impertinences that cantered Rotten Row with me! How I blessed Chrissy's fat Shetland pony (a famous gift from the Major) on which we had all of us practised every deed of daring that the mind of boy or tomboy could conceive! An English groom, the flotsam of the Warwick livery stable, had taken pains to teach Bert, who passed on to us, the English rise to the trot that was considered so "affected" at that time, in the town, and mounted us more than once, for bribes of the doctor's tobacco, on the one or two riding horses the stable boasted. No one could live with the doctor and be long ignorant of the good points of the greatest of all animals, and my shrewd criticisms on the horseflesh submitted to my lordly judgment by Pat's eager friends, my final well-weighed purchase of the chestnut cob deemed worthy, put me beyond the need of any further sponsorship.

"Gad, my boy, I wouldn't mind you pickin' me a hunter, myself!" the Major vouchsafed, warmly. "You should have seen him, Stacey—Pat's a babe to him!"

THE INHERITANCE

"Oh, come now, Major," says Pat, "that's not quite fair—look how the gov'nor keeps one down to eighty quid! Give me an accommodating banker in the States to send on all I cable for, and watch me!"

They smile, but the smile is a respectful one, the characteristic English smile that greets the golden means of the comfort and leisure they among all nations know best how to use and enjoy. The mammas smile, the pink maidens smile, the young bloods that remember my supper after the play smile, and Lady Kitty, shapely and swaying on her grey gelding, smiles, too, and glances at the new bangle on her wrist. And I—heaven help me!—I smile, too, and pat the neck of the chestnut cob and tap my varnished riding-boots—the boots of the Honourable Mr. Avesham. Was there in the garments of that unexceptionably clothed honourable some insidious virus, some inoculation of extravagance that penetrated the system, swiftly and surely, and wrapped the wearer of them in a blinding, golden haze that veiled all the sharp angles of actuality with the vagueness of a Fairy Prince future? It seems to me now that there must have been. Certainly I had not worn those breeches an hour before a borrowed nag appeared impossible to me, and the purchase of Emperor, the chestnut, seemed the merest necessity.

And now I come to an embarrassing point in these memories, a point which a certain foolish candour will not let me disallow, though it may stand seriously in my way with the publisher of these idle memoirs, if ever they attain such a chimerical importance. For in case they should in these circumstances ever fall into the hands of male youth of the age of the subject of my poor ramblings, I realize perfectly that it should be the object of the instructor of such youth to draw a weighty moral as

I GLIMPSE MY INHERITANCE

to the effect of the undoubted dissipation of time, money and energy on my part during the six weeks that I spent in and about London, and that said effects should be pictured as taking the form of weakness, pallor, ill looks, *et cetera*—the undying accompaniments in the Edgeworth school, of late nights, empty bottles, dawdling mornings and lack of useful employment. But I am writing of things as they were, not as they might have—or should have—been, and I find it necessary to record that those six weeks were six weeks of the greatest physical *bien être*, in one sense, of my life!

The regular, hard exercise, the full, meat diet, the generous wines, the open-air existence, the shock of the cold, bracing baths which I learned to take at that time, above all, the delicious, prodigal feeling of superiority, ease and irresponsibility, brought about in me a glow, a solidity, an elasticity that I had never before experienced. To ride hard all the morning, then stand tingling from the buckets that young Viscount Pellegrue's man threw over us in the little marble *salle de bain* he had had built into his suite of bachelor rooms in Berkeley Square, to be officially helped into fresh, lavender-scented linen by the absurd little frog in buttons I had taken over for my London sojourn from Ulick Vale, Lady Kitty's cousin, who had trained him into a fair valet and who pointed out that since I had to have a groom, this creature, Greggs by name, had been raised from that estate originally and might as well give me the advantage of these two accomplishments—when I had emerged from his hands, I say, scented and buttonholed (I always wore a white rose since I had first met Lady Kitty wearing one, and she had commented favourably on it), my moustache (shades of Warwick!) *waxed*, and my hair over the left temple not entirely innocent of one deft twist of the tongs; when

THE INHERITANCE

I had devoured a delicate, clear soup, a bit of sole, a generous slice of red, juicy beef, a bowl of *escarole* mixed into a salad by Pelligrew's incomparable man, all washed down with as much of a quart of Burgundy as left little enough for Greggs; when, lolling at Ulick's rooms over his own Turkish coffee and the special cigarettes that just fitted my famous silver case (it had got, somehow, by now, a "G" in turquoises on one side, and the cigarettes proved to have a tremendous success since I had persuaded the tobacconist—at a price—to keep all of that size for my personal consumption), when, rolling a thimbleful of apricot brandy under my tongue, I lolled about, I say, joking Ulick over his little dancer, in full fed, contented torpor, that terrible candour I have invoked compels me to say that I was never healthier in my life!

What I had learned to regard as "dissipation" at Yale was entirely a matter of closed rooms, and wine suppers that only irritated over-taut nerves, unrelieved by strenuous exercise and good feeding—for our college fare was of the kind popularly supposed in New England to be conducive to high thinking. Moreover, I never had an idea of good wine till I came to London, for the stuff doled out to our unsuspecting youth, at terrible prices, was not even a remote cousin to the generous clarets and Burgundies that I soon learned to appreciate. I was fair enough at rowing and baseball, but not heavy enough for football as it is now played, nor quick enough for the game at that date, and not up to a Varsity standard in any of the three. So, like a normal American youth, as I could not take a part in the picked crews, I eschewed violent exercise altogether and sat, a contented and uproarious spectator, at the various contests.

But now, what with riding in the morning, boxing, fencing or rowing in the afternoon, and dancing all night

I GLIMPSE MY INHERITANCE

long—for Parliament sat very late that summer and all London lingered with it—eating and drinking five times in the twenty-four hours and sleeping when I needed to, I literally spread out and up, and Mr. Goodenow let out chest and shoulders of the Honorable Avesham's *trousseau*.

Let me take up the tale of my worthless—but how amusing!—day, and see if I can fill you with the scandalised Warwickian sense of its luxurious uselessness.

When the effects of our luncheon had worn off we caused cabs to be summoned—except Pelligrew, who kept his own, and Lord Landry's second son, who used his father's—and drove majestically, ogling the crowd as we passed, to a mysterious, bare room near the Brixton Road, where Young Tom, a gigantic black, obliged all and sundry young blades with as much punishment in gloves as they cared to pay for. I was fairly good at that, and particularly good at wrestling, which was a hobby of Dr. Crane's, he having been exceptionally well trained in it by a Magyar servant of his father's in Geneva. He had taught us more than one clever dodge at his favourite sport, and these, forgotten for nearly three years, came back to me gradually and won more excited admiration, now, than I had ever dreamed of when I learned them more to please the old doctor than for any other reason.

One particular “throw” Young Tom condescended to beg to learn, offering me in exchange free bouts with the gloves, and one day as I lay panting on a leather couch, after a hard demonstration of my skill (for Young Tom was very earnest in his pursuit of knowledge), I heard a husky whisper from the window ledge:

“hI sye, mates, look alive there an’ you’ll see the toff as give Young Tom wot for—’e’s lyin’ down, wropped up in a blanket!”

THE INHERITANCE

We all stared—I among the rest—to see the “toff,” and met the adoring gaze of a window ledge of gutter boys, hanging perilously from the gutters they were related to, peering into our sanctum. As I looked, Landry (he was called “Laundry” or “the Wash”) gave a guffaw.

“You silly ass, it’s *you* he means!” cried the Wash, and sure enough, I, little Hughie Gordon, was the toff!

How good the scrub-down with Young Tom’s assistant’s hair mittens, and the glow that filled every vein and artery as we drove back, dazzling Piccadilly, to ride at anchor at Pellegrew’s cousins’ in Grosvenor Square, where one got the best teacake in London, and ate plates of it, also buttered scones and jam roll and four cups of tea with yellow cream and so much sugar that the youngest cousin was ashamed to send the footman out again for more!

Then, with promised dances scribbled on our cuffs, off to the stable where I kept my bull pup, a snowy, massive creature with a pedigree beside which the Vere de Veres were of mushroom growth. This bull pup had become a sort of fetish among us, and the story of his acquisition is so characteristic of the curious light in which Fate saw fit to exhibit me to my new friends, that I must not slight it.

Comments on my riding, so much better than that of most Colonials, brought the old Warwick livery-stable groom before mentioned so clearly to my mind that I exhumed, along with poor, drunken Skidder’s sandy, bleary visage, a chance recommendation to “mind I went to Humbleby’s in the old Kent Road, number 39, down the alley, if ever I wanted a good pit bull.” This apparently irrelevant remark, so little likely to apply, at the time, to any further circumstances of mine, seemed to have been bitten into my memory with acid, and on my

I GLIMPSE MY INHERITANCE

carelessly admiring a little terrier bitch of Ulick's, and his recommending the famous Midland Kennels that bred her, I found myself saying quietly that my own choice was a good pit bull, and that I had an idea of hunting up a great *connoisseur* in that line in the old Kent Road recommended strongly by an old groom.

An old groom, mark you, not my old groom. I spoke, as I thought, vaguely, but was supposed by my circle and by Humbleby (who turned up, as everything English does turn up, in the same place) to have implied that Skidder was one of my home retinue. Humbleby, in fact, would hear of nothing else, and being prevented from addressing me as "your lordship," compromised on "your honour," and was sympathetically eager to hear of old Bill Skidder's good berth in the States with such a fine young master, begging my honour's pardon, but a better stablehand than Bill never was and never will be found, when not in liquor, be who he may! And for a good drench, there never was his equal, drunk *or* sober. He could bring a sick animal around in better time, could Bill—

"Don't want to interfere, Gordon, old chap, but should say you were rather an ass to let him go—man like that's good as a vet," murmurs the Wash through his Havana, and I hasten to explain.

"But, my dear Laundry, I didn't mean that it was *my*—"

"Oh, not your honour's fault, I'll lay," says Humbleby warmly; "'e'd always lose his berth, would old Bill, account o' the drink. 'Ow else would he a left Lord Utter, and 'er Ladyship weeping tears at losing of 'im, along of 'er little bay mare that 'e syved from the knacker with that drench o' his? But it 'ad to be."

"Oh, you'll take him on again, when you go home,"

THE INHERITANCE

says Pat easily. "Chap always does, you know. Can't manage, unless. Always so."

It appears that I must add Skidder to my establishment, already elastic enough to include a racing stable, a cellar unrivalled for West Indian liqueurs, and a Magyar body servant, and I do so fatalistically, whereat Humbleby touches a greasy, grateful cap, and we go to inspect the dogs.

They come tumbling and snarling and grinning out into the tiny, paved court which appears to be their recreation ground, and I gaze at them rather blankly, for I don't like them as much as I'd hoped I should. One among them, a broad-beamed, heavy-jowled, incredibly wrinkled object of an obviously different strain from the others, takes my eye and I point my malacca stick languidly at him.

"What's his figure?" I ask.

"There, now, look at 'im!" Humbleby cries admiringly, "can you fool 'im, I arsk yer? Not to any hextent, gentlemen, not much! Wot's 'is figger, says 'e? That, your honour, is nigh onto bein' the champion of England, that is, and so nigh that you might *call* 'im so and not call 'im much out of 'is nyme! That's a five 'undred guinea dorg, gentlemen, and got with an eye to the fancy, more than private tryde. 'Ector's Glory 'is nyme is, son o' Glory's East Anglia. I got 'im to try a bit o' breedin' o' my own, to cross with one o' me own strain, but if your honour says the word . . . "

I gasp, but hold my own.

"A fine dog, Humbleby, but a little high for me. I merely mentioned him."

"I see, sir. And if you've an equal eye for the 'orses, sir, I pity Bill that 'e 'ad to leave your honour's stybles, I do! Well, now, about 'ow 'igh was your honour thinkin'

I GLIMPSE MY INHERITANCE

to go? 'Undred an' a 'alf? 'Undred an' a quarter? I 'ave one at a 'undred (guineas) that I've got on commission from a friend, like, who must sell for ready money—Alf, get out that big fellow that come in Tuesday was a week."

Alf got out the big fellow and he was more than adequate to his description: we looked at each other and were destined.

And I, after one long, careful survey, paid for that fifty pounds odd of caninity the price of one year's lodging, food and instruction at Yale College, U. S. A., and paid it on the nail, without a murmur!

"Pounds, sir, we'll say pounds, your honour—I could do no less for Bill's old master and such a gentleman, sir—it's a pleasure to serve you! If not as in hevery way claimed, return 'im tomorrer and receive the full sum, your honour! And if it's not a liberty, my regards to Bill Skidder and 'earty thanks for 'is recommend. And pleased to serve any o' your honour's friends—a line from your honour will get my personal attention. The pup's not named, sir. Thank you."

"What should you call him, Gordon?"

"I baptize him *Stranger*," I said; "here Stranger, here boy!"

And Pat's eyes met mine with a gleam of comprehension.

"I'll stand godfather, Gordon!" he cried; "here, you, here's to drink Stranger's health! 'A Stranger, but still a Gordon,' eh?"

"'A Stranger but still a Gordon!'" they cry all together, and moved by some mad, boyish instinct, I take off my hat swiftly, and stoop to pat my dog, with misted eyes. Ah, well, how one felt, *how one felt*, I say, those years!

THE INHERITANCE

I was too little versed in ladies' hearts to realize how it was that the secret I had supposed shared between Gideon Geddie, Lady Kitty and me should have filtered out, little by little, and seemed to be known, in a vague, undetailed way, to all my world of London. I myself had been rigid; it never occurred to me that Lady Kitty, my adored monitress, could have broken her own rule, and I was not unnaturally forced (consider my age!) to the conclusion that either Geddie himself, aware that I had more friends at court than any one could have foreseen, had been beforehand with me, to save his face, or that old, half-forgotten stories, covered at the time, were resurrecting themselves from neglected London memories.

And this last was not entirely a false idea. On the great night of the Stacey ball, when for the first time I met Pat's mother, more surprises were in store for me than would have sufficed to turn an older and warier head than mine. The great, lighted mansion, the red velvet across the pavement, the gaping London throngs, the fragrant, crowded hall, the sprightly violins, the lines of powdered footmen—all these were no more to me than to Ulick, who entered with me, or to Patty, who welcomed me, I verily believe. To tell the truth, I hardly noticed them, for my brain was boiling, and the violins sang no waltzes and polkas to my dizzy ears, but screamed a very triumphal entry. For in the entering crush, a mellow voice behind me had penetrated to me and the voice had said :

"Why, there's old Wilkie's boy with Ulick Vale—I had thought him in India. How that lad has improved, and how much he looks like Hugo! Poor Hugo—how handsome he used to be, when all's said and done! I never thought his nevvy'd equal him, but I believe he will."

I GLIMPSE MY INHERITANCE

"S-sh, Bishop, that's not Goggy—that's the mysterious lost heir from Bermuda! The one that Kitty Vale-Griffiths——"

"Ahem, my dear, perhaps it would be just as well not to go into that. But, God bless me, you don't mean to tell me that's not a Gordon? With that chin?"

"But he *is* a Gordon. A *Mister* Gordon, and the image of Hugo. And as rich as Crœsus. You know Hugo lived in Bermuda——"

The voice dies down.

"Steady on, Gordon! Easy does it," Ulick murmurs at my elbow, and I see that he is leading me away from the voice.

"Then you—you know?" I stammer, for I see he is as red as I.

"No more than you want me to, old fellow," he says soothingly. "It's—it's a damned shame, anyhow," he adds vaguely. "He's an old fox, Geddie. My uncle—that's Lord Cecil, you know—told me Gideon would sell his soul any day for Lady Grace's shoe-buckle. Uncle Cis hunted out an old letter last night for Cousin Kit—I think she'll bring it you. She said she pitied Goggy when he saw that letter—Lord, but they had it hot and heavy, Goggy and Kitty! She never forgave him for going to India. There she is, now."

But before I can get to her Pat seizes me and leads me chafing to Lady Stacey.

"Here, mater, here he is at last," says Pat. "Let me present Mr. Gordon—Mr. Gordon, my mother, Lady Stacey."

Surely the handsome matron in the emerald collar turns pale as I bow? Surely she glances strangely at Pat and away again? Surely after I have passed before her murmuring something or other that neither of us hears,

THE INHERITANCE

I hear her say quickly, "Where is your father, Parravale? I must speak to your father."

And when I meet the Filly, whose other name is Taffy, whose other name is the Honourable Phyllis Stacey, she gapes, actually, into my face.

"Why, if it isn't Goggy's twin!" she cries. "Did you ever in all your life, Pat? And the image of Jumping Joan!"

"Shut up, Taffy, you're howling too loud," says Pat rudely, "and he's better looking than Goggy. However," as I push past them, "he's after the same lady, fast enough!"

The Honourable Phyllis blushes a deep rose and turns her haughty chestnut head away from me, but I care little for that, nor for the fact that Pat maliciously brought on that *hauteur* (because he does not love Goggy, disapproves of his mother's scheme for marrying Taffy to him, and is jealous of his connection—or would-be connection—with Lady Kitty).

My own position with this queen of youthful hearts has become so obvious that the crowd of younger brothers and subalterns melts decorously away as I approach, and we swing into a polka without a word of greeting—a dangerous sign, young people, if you don't know!

"You have a letter for me?" I ask after we have circled the room two or three times in silence.

But this is too abrupt. You, of course, wouldn't be guilty of such a *sottise*, young man who reads this—I know you! And she was looking her loveliest in pale sky-blue with forget-me-nots in her hair and my bangle on her wrist.

"Letter? letter?" she pouts, "one would think I was a post office! You are not too gallant, *milord*."

I GLIMPSE MY INHERITANCE

Even the jest of that title quivers through me. She is so close to me and so soft and fragrant, her eyes are so schooled to convey just what *nuance* of emotion she chooses, the violins are so shrill and sweet!

“Don’t play with me—Kitty!” I whisper, “don’t, for God’s sake! Can’t you see that I must know *who* it is that loves you so much, before I tell you? That I haven’t any right, until?”

Oh, world of London, that teaches even a son of New England so quickly what he may say and do to lovely Lady Kitties! Oh, Master Hughie, what would they say in Warwick if they knew that Lady Kitty was not even the unscrupulous widow they would deplore, but owned a noble and very much alive lord in the bonds of holy matrimony? And, oh, mammas of all the pink-and-whiteness of England, do you really believe that the aforesaid pink-and-whiteness is quite so ignorant of the Lady Kitties as you tell us? Really? *Je m’en doute*, to employ the useful tongue so undoubtedly invented for the discussion of these delicate subjects!

After that outburst of mine, my divinity was silent, and she was of those whose silence is far more subtle than their speech. Only, as we finished our polka, and I gave her up to a young giant of a cavalry man, she pointed to a waltz with my initials scratched against it, and whispered, “In the library.” I nodded and sought out the Honourable Taffy, whose curiosity caused her to pencil out the twin brother of an Earldom (he was seventeen minutes younger than the heir!) and dance two of his waltzes with me.

“Mamma’s in a frightful wax about you,” she confided; “she is going to write to Lady Grace first mail. Did you know?”

THE INHERITANCE

"No. Is she? Why?"

"I don't know." She looks up obliquely, "but I supposed you did. Pat does."

"Does he?"

"Yes. He said, 'All right, mater, but I suppose you know you're pretty certain to upset the apple-cart. From what I hear, I'd hate to be the one to tell them.' Mamma was furious. Do you know Goggy—Sir Wilkie's son?"

"By name only."

"It's all very odd," she says, curiously, "but I expect we'll all know, sooner or later. Did mamma ask you to Staceways?"

"No."

"She was going to. But I think she'll wait, now, till she hears from Lady Grace. I hope you'll come and bring your dog. We've heard so much about him. Your stables must be beautiful—I adore horses, you know. Violet Utter said you had their old groom, Skidder—he taught me to ride: put me on my first pony when we were visiting Vi at Utterfields. He had six boys under him there, but I suppose you have lots more."

I smile enigmatically (Oh, Master Hughie!) and guide her skillfully to the glowering twin who entered this vale of tears seventeen minutes too late.

"Don't be too severe, Mountstuart," I say, audaciously, "you know I'm a stranger in London."

"A stranger—but still a Gordon!" somebody chuckles, whirling by me, and though I start and turn, it is too late to trace the voice. The very mystery of it intoxicates me: it seems that I am a prince at a masked ball, and that all the dancers know it and we shall soon unmask. . . . Oh, that any drink could be brewed in human vats to match that nectar of the gods mixed of hope and youth!

I waited in the library and fumed impatiently among

I GLIMPSE MY INHERITANCE

the ivories and folios, but she did not keep me long. And with her perfect knowledge of the young male heart and how far to press it, she drew from her blue bodice a folded letter, even as she crossed the threshold, and handed it, still a-warm, to my eager grasp.

"It is from Aunt Biddy to Uncle Cecil," she explained quickly; "just the pages that tell about—about you. He remembered directly, and he says it looks bad for Grace. It seems there was a great deal of talk, at the time."

I dash at the spidery, Italian pages, written close in violet ink on thin, crackly paper.

"About poor Lady Senna, it's all as ridiculous and tiresome as everything else the woman did—or didn't do—she seems bound to make trouble for dear Grace, even in her grave! It appears that she did *not* die in childbirth, as Hays writes, but a *week later*, because her people have just got a letter that she wrote saying, '*I can't bear to look at the poor, dear little baby, though I feel I must, for he has no friend but me. His father has been drinking all this week and has not come near us. It seems terrible that the boy is to have no rights at Hopes-tairs—I can't but feel he would be better dead. My troubles, thank God, are nearly over—I shall never see England again, I know. Esther Palse has been so good—so kind, but she cries and cries, and I know that my strength cannot last long. How I wish I had never left you all and the shop—but no one can blame the Wilkie Gordons, they have borne too much from Hugo. But I did love him once. And that poor little boy but a week old and Esther with all to manage—God be merciful to her!*'

"I copied this from the letter itself, because,

THE INHERITANCE

as the Palses say, it was very odd that a baby a week old shouldn't have been in the coffin with poor Senna's body. And Hugo saying all along that the child was born too prematurely for burial—dreadful! I suppose the long and short of it is that he realized when he was brought face to face with his disgraceful *mes-alliance* just how disgraceful it was, and hated the child.

"Old Slade, that was my maid before I was married, you know, is a great friend of the Palse woman that was a poor connection of the family and went out with Lady Senna—the one they called Salts—and she was with them when the letter finally came—it had got delayed, and they were furious and wanted to go straight to Mr. Geddie and have the child's body looked up and buried with the mother, but she, Esther Palse, said not to think of it; that Hugo was wicked enough without making him tell any more blasphemous lies, and that poor Lady Gordon wouldn't have thanked them for making any more disturbance. Slade said she was dreadfully upset by the letter, and wondered how it could have been mailed, and got them to promise to burn it. At last they did, but Slade copied out this page of it, privately of course, and brought it to me, the week before she died, poor old thing. She said it looked so odd. What do you think, yourself?"

Here the page ended abruptly.

"Uncle Cis says it all comes back to him now," Lady Kitty added, as I lifted my eyes from the pages, "and he and Aunt Biddy gossipped a lot over it, he says. There was some horrid scandal about a servant maid, you see, that really sent them off to Bermuda, and Wilkie got the

I GLIMPSE MY INHERITANCE

whip-hand then, and I suppose . . . this . . . was the price."

"This?"

"Well—you, then!"

"Are you sure enough—Kitty?"

"Sure, Hugh? I have been sure ever since I saw you!"

The music comes but faintly to this great library, is almost subdued, in fact, by the fountain in the conservatory, but a charitable observer, passing us, must have concluded that we, too, were waltzing. . . .

As she draws away from me, I catch her hand, and even she, blonde veteran at this most ancient of games, cannot unclasp her soft, pulsing fingers from mine, once they have touched.

"What is that waltz?" I whisper, and she whispers back:

"It is the *Blue Danube*—don't you remember?"

"I shall never forget it. . . ."

Oh, wicked, wonderful, human *Danube*! How many hearts, how many reputations, how many pasts and futures have your languorous blue waves engulfed! They have risen, those charmed musical waters, up to the hearts, the lips, of how many generations of waltzers, till the poor, happy fools felt too late that you were over their heads, and they were floating out, drugged with your insidious, swaying melody, to the open sea and the night-fog!

*"Und das hat mit ihrem Singen
Die Lorelei gethan!"*

CHAPTER XIV

In Which I Taste of Stolen Waters

IT was three in the dim London morning when I carried Lady Kitty home from the ball, doubly drunken, with the Stacey champagne, of which I had taken far more than was good for me, and the first passion of my young manhood, against which there are no signable pledges, even in South Warwick! And yet, when in the quiet of my rooms (I had taken the suite a story above Lord Pellegrew, on Patty's advice, who said significantly that there was no telling for how long I might want them, and a quarter in advance was nothing to me, he supposed), when, I say, in the still, smoky dawn of those pleasant, luxurious new quarters of mine I turned out the contents of my pockets on the mantel, where Lady Kitty's photograph stood daringly in its silver, turquoise-studded frame and Ulick's little dancer flaunted her abbreviated petticoats opposite—tangled with the spray of satin forget-me-nots that had pressed my deity's white bosom was a little pink silk rosebud: there had been one of these on each of the Honourable Phyllis Stacey's satin slippers when first we waltzed together, at eleven! At one I had been in the library; at one-thirty I had bribed the musicians and waltzed through a second *Blue Danube*—the maddest, richest waltzing I should ever keep time to—and at two-fifteen, exactly, in the conservatory, I had cut from Taffy's slipper, with a tiny, thin gold pocket-knife, that naughty little pink rosebud, and Taffy had blushed above me!

I TASTE OF STOLEN WATERS

And Lady Kitty, floating into the conservatory with Pat, had noted the blush, and scribbled on her dance-card: "It should have been Hugo, not Hugh, *mon cher: bon chien chasse de race!*"

And Pat had growled, but not too seriously, "I say, Gordon, but you *are* going it, rather! Cutting Goggy out every way!"

And I had laughed, a little loudly, I'm afraid, and urged Taffy to promise she'd be riding in the afternoon and I would have Gregg bring the famous Stranger for her to see.

"Has he really rough turquoises on his collar?" she had asked, and I had answered:

"Yes—it was a present to him—from an old friend." And she had stammered, "So—so I heard. Vi says that all the young men l-like o-older women . . . at first!"

Oh, pink-and-whiteness of the London fogs! And, oh, that strange curiosity—a lad's first passion!

On the table, propped against the crystal tantalus and steadied with my favourite foil, was a foreign letter, in an unfamiliar handwriting. I slit it open unsteadily with a tortoise-shell dagger—Lord Pellegrue's present to me on taking up my lodgings—and read, in the wonderful legal longhand of England, that Mr. Gideon Geddie, solicitor, detained at Etretat by a sprained ankle, presented his compliments to Mr. Hugh Gordon and advised him, as the person probably best informed as to Mr. Gordon's affairs, to take one of two courses: either to return promptly to the United States of America (the course most strongly recommended by Mr. Geddie), or, if this should not prove agreeable to Mr. Gordon, to travel as rapidly as possible to confer with Mr. Geddie at his lodgings in Etretat, where Mr. Geddie would most unfortunately be detained for fully a week's time.

THE INHERITANCE

Mr. Geddie could not but regret that Mr. Gordon had not seen fit to observe the spirit—if not the exact letter—of the agreement undoubtedly explained to him by his guardians, who had appeared hitherto most scrupulous and well advised during a period so nearly completing the terms of the agreement, but inferred that Mr. Gordon stood ready to accept the consequences to which he must perceive his unguarded allusions and unwise choice of friends (one in particular) had laid him open. *Mr. Geddie could not sufficiently impress Mr. Gordon with the futility of his inferences, no matter from what premises they might have been drawn*, and trusted that this warning might prove sufficient; *in which case*, in view of the exemplary attitude of Mr. Gordon and his guardians during practically the whole period of his minority, Mr. Geddie felt that he might go so far as to assure Mr. Gordon that no difference would be made in the last two quarterly allowances (since no official steps had yet been taken), and moreover that he might strain a point, in view of the exemplary attitude before mentioned, and add that a fairly considerable sum, sufficient for partly (at least) establishing a respectable trade—or professional—career, *if undertaken in the United States of America*, would be placed, as a final transaction, in Mr. Gordon's hands, on the attainment of his majority.

Trusting that he might hear by return of post either of Mr. Gordon's intention to return to the States or to visit him at Etretat, he was, Mr. Gordon's obed't serv't, Gideon Geddie. *P. S.* In the event of such a course having possibly occurred to Mr. Gordon, Mr. Geddie could not refrain from warning him against visiting Hopestairs, Shropshire, previous to an interview with himself. G. G.

I TASTE OF STOLEN WATERS

In the glass over the mirror I caught a glimpse of my flushed, snarling face and recoiled from it. Was that hot-eyed, hasty fellow that cursed a paper, crumpled in his shaking fist, really I?

Furiously I jerked at the bell that communicated with Greggs' attic; furiously I tore at my tailed coat; furiously I looked out the trains by a guttering candle.

"Get me a cold bath and my serge suit and a brandy-and-soda, double-quick!" I ordered the sleepy, half-dressed fellow, "and tell Mr. Vane I can't box this morning—I must catch the four-twenty Shropshire special."

"Four-twenty, sir?"

"Draw the bath, damn you!" I growled, and he fled, buttoning himself amazedly.

It was barely more than a half hour later that I went out, through the quiet halls, into early morning London. My head was braced into the factitious clearness that a sleepless night, a cold bath, a brandy-and-soda and fresh clothes can produce, and I felt very calm and steady, more master of myself than was, in fact, quite normal. A drowsy, grateful cabby, voyaging for luck through Old Bond Street, caught me, and we travelled clop-clap through the sleeping thoroughfares, meeting only the early milk and some market carts heaped with sea-green cabbage and curly kale, gay posies bunched among the dewy mounds and a sprawled, somnolent driver a-top.

The hour that I sped along in the express passed like a tenth of itself, while quick, clear images of what had been and what must be, now, raced through my deceptively steady head. I passed Great Hope and Little Hope-mead and got out at Hopestairs Lower Cross as placidly as though I had been coming home from school there every long vacation of my life. It was after five in the morning, and more than one cart was to be seen on the

THE INHERITANCE

road, the cloaked figure of more than one old woman passed me by (for in the 80's one still saw cloaks in English villages very frequently), as I struck off on the way to Hopestairs, as pointed out to me by a clumsy boy, driving a little donkey. The way was plain and every half mile or so I passed some cottager or labourer, no one of whom but touched a cap or pulled a straggling forelock, with a stupid, wondering look at my face.

When I reached the great lodge and the heavy iron gate, a shock-headed fellow ran out at a call from within, knuckling his forehead hastily, as he pulled at the big hasp.

"Why, it's Mr. Hugo, for sure!" a woman's voice called, "and us thinking him 'way over in Injy! Come out, father, and—oh, I beg your pardon, sir, I'm sure, but I thought . . . why, it's never . . . should I know you, sir?"

"Hardly," I answered cheerfully, "but you seem to think you do! My name is Gordon."

"And indeed I don't need to be told that, sir. Mr. Gordon from . . ."

"From the States. Can I see Hopestairs?"

"Indeed, sir, and I'm only sorry the family's away—we'll do the best we can. Sir Wilkie and Lady Gordon are in France with Miss Joan, but they're expected yesterday week. Tommy, run up with the gentleman and tell Mrs. Pullfit to show the house herself—I'll be up directly."

Tommy pockets a shilling and runs ahead, and I follow for a mile of shaded path and lofty beech aisle, hedge-row and coppice, a wonderful glimpse of deer park and a willow-fringed pond with a rustic bridge.

"This here's the short mile cut," Tommy vouchsafed, "big road goes on nigh a mile more. Us'll go woodway."

I TASTE OF STOLEN WATERS

And "woodway" we go, rabbits starting from under our feet, quail piping in the distance, the morning dew glistening on the boughs. Truly, a fair heritage, this old Hopestairs—and whose? I pull the crumpled sheets from my pocket feverishly. "*The poor, dear little baby . . . he has no friend but me . . . it seems terrible that the boy is to have no rights.*" . . . O Mr. Geddie, is there no fair play in England? "*A respectable trade,*" indeed!

Now the big, dark brick house starts out at us, brightened with whitestone facings, draped with wrist-thick ivy vines.

"They creepers be that full o' nests!" says Tommy.

Some one has gone faster than we, for Mrs. Pullfit, rustling in black silk and a swelling gold chain, is in the hall, and from window and door pop eager heads, withdrawn when I look. Mrs. Pullfit is excited and curious, for she has been twenty-two years at Hopestairs, Mr. Gordon, and never so much as heard of any of the family in the States. Pettibone, be so good as to preserve Mr. Gordon's card most carefully. Mr. Hugh Gordon? Indeed! How disappointed her ladyship will be! What will Mr. Gordon have, Pettibone?

But Mr. Gordon will have nothing, thank you, and he has but an hour to spare, as he has a luncheon engagement in town.

"You're not strange, then, to London, sir?"

Mr. Gordon mentions Lord Parravale, Viscount Pelle-grew, Mr. Ulick Vane, and sundry others of his friends.

Ah! A-a-a-h! Will Lady Gordon know the address, when she returns?

Why, yes, Mr. Gordon is rather of the opinion that she will.

Naturally, of course. Would Mr. Gordon like to see the 'ouse, being here?

THE INHERITANCE

Mr. Gordon thinks he would.

And so, with never a question as to this informally early hour for visiting a gentleman's country house, Mrs. Pullfit conducted me through the state drawing rooms, the family drawing room, the bedroom where George the Fourth had slept, the dining room with the Hepplewhite suite, the upper, panelled passage where Lady Emilia Gordon had been killed by her brother, for cause shown, and where she accordingly and subsequently walked in white, and finally the gallery. It was not so very extensive, for the family had not, it appeared, been notably one of *connoisseurs*, but there were a Reynolds, a couple of Romneys, some mellow Morlands, and a reputed Rembrandt. And into one of the pictures I looked as one looks into a mirror, and beheld myself, encompassed with a gold frame.

Mrs. Pullfit gasped and swallowed.

"Th-the late Baronet, Mr. Gordon, Sir Hugo," she brought out explosively, "painted when at Oxford. I was sewing maid when it was brought home, and well remember it. Did you—had you ever—I think you said you had never met the late Baronet, sir?"

No, Mr. Gordon had never had that pleasure.

Excusing the liberty, but as an old servant of the family . . . was Mr. Gordon born in the States?

Mr. Gordon (clutching at a paper in his pocket) was born in Bermuda.

"God be good to us all!" cried Mrs. Pullfit and went white as paper and sank into a carved Elizabethan chair. And a half dozen maids appeared mysteriously and brought her water and a drop of something and stole sly glances at the guest and the portrait of the late Baronet.

I felt ashamed but defiant, and went out hastily, at-

I TASTE OF STOLEN WATERS

tended by Pettibone, apologising contritely for Mrs. Pullfit, who'd not been quite the thing for these three days, it seemed, and was overtaxing herself. And then I peeped into the stables, glanced at the formal garden with the sun dial, passed by the wall fruit, shook myself free of the peeping heads and whispering voices that sprang up wherever I went, and cut across the fields abruptly.

I followed a worn path with seats beside it at intervals, unconscious of any definite goal, weak with fasting and fatigue and more feeling than I had dreamed that pictured face could wake in me. I had no sense of sonship in looking at it—he was too young, the man there, for that. But who could look at us, he and I, and doubt for a moment what I was to him? I walked, staggering and muttering to myself, for I don't know how long, and the morning deepened as I walked, and the air cleared, and the birds sang in the English fields and I—can you blame me that I looked over those fields and cursed the chicanery that had kept me from them?

In the lee of a thick green hedge, close by a little white-washed cottage that smelt of bergamot and sun-drying linen, I flung myself down on a haycock and fell into an exhausted sleep. In my thick dreams I talked and pleaded with Mrs. Pullfit, and it was with no real surprise therefore that I heard her voice as I woke.

“‘A turn,’ says you! Why, nurse, I was that faint inside of me as never was! If Hetty there hadn't brought me the sal volatile, I don't say I *shouldn't* have quite fainted off, I don't.”

“Well, well,” says another voice, the dry, toneless voice of an old woman, “to think of it! And 'twas Master Hugo, was it? And why didn't he come to see

THE INHERITANCE

Nurse Holley, then? Did he grudge a few steps to a old woman?"

"No, no, Mrs. Holley; not Sir Hugo! He's dead, you know, dead these fifteen years and more."

"Aye, so he is. This was Master Goggy you're meaning. But they sent him to India, surely? Account of that nasty Irish woman—I know. I heard her poor young ladyship telling of it."

"No, no, Nurse; Master Goggy's safe enough from her. And her ladyship's not to say young any longer, you know. No, this was one from Bermuda."

"Bermuda? Bermuda? Where poor Esther Palse went with her ladyship that was? I'm glad she had Emma with her—there was more of Emma than ever you knew, my girl—eh, that was a bad business! An' I washed him on my lap an' who'd have guessed what he'd be? But there was never a handsomer Gordon born than Hugo. Is this his son, then?"

"Oh, Mrs. Holley, who knows? I got Hetty to order me out the ponycart and Wilkins drove me himself—I had to come. Try to remember, Mrs. Holley—there's no doubt that her ladyship—Lady Emma, you know—her they called Senna—died in childbed? It's up in the church, surely?"

"Eh, my dear, 'twas a bad business—a bad business! I know this: there was a good much poor Lady Grace never knew. Esther Palse's second cousin—the 'pothecary's wife, you know, her ladyship's own mother, she was here in my cottage raving over a letter, and Esther quieting her.

"'Say no more, Cousin Ann, say no more,' says Esther, 'what's done is done, and my word is passed. He was a devil and deceived right and left, but Emma's name is safe.'

I TASTE OF STOLEN WATERS

“‘Your Emma’s, yes,’ cries Mrs. Palse, ‘but is mine to be marked a liar? Where’s that baby that was a week old when she wrote? Where’s the heir of Hope-stairs?’”

“So loud she cried that I couldn’t but hear her, and I threatened to send for her ladyship, but Esther stopped me.

“‘Nurse Holley,’ says she to me, ‘mark my words, as I hope to die,’ says she, ‘Ann Palse knows nothing at all. A good friend to all our family the Gordons have been, and my word is passed to them, and will be kept. If silence is sometimes paid for, Mrs. Holley,’ says she, ‘you can depend that them that takes the pay knows well for what they take it. The letter is burned and was on a subject Ann Palse will do well to forget, if she did but know it,’ she says. Eh, poor Mrs. Palse—she was dead before the month was out, she and Jemima Slade and Abel Palse the son, with the smallpox, and Emma in the Bermudas with God knows what—gone, all gone! And they blood kin to a baronet’s wife! Dear, dear!”

“She said there was an heir!”

“Hush, deary; I’m an old woman, now. And the letter was burned, so Esther said. Esther Palse was a Christian woman, and never missed the first Sunday in the month regular. Who was the young gentleman that come?”

“Mrs. Holley, if you had but seen him! He was Sir Hugo to an eyelash, and high and easy, like all of them. And the look he sent at Sir Wilkie’s picture, Mrs. Holley! And the young boy Tommy said he fair ate the trees and the deer park, with looking at them! Tell me, dear, is Esther Palse living?”

“It was her—or Emma—that died away in the islands,

THE INHERITANCE

deary. Or else Emma came back . . . aye, it was Emma that died. So maybe Esther lived. But I'm old, you see——”

“Yes, indeed, Nurse, and I'm a fool to worry you, so I am. I've brought you some marrow broth, and you have a bit of a lie-down, now, and forget me and my bothers. I must settle those cackling girls. . . .”

I got up softly and stepped by the cottage, keeping the hedge between. There was but one place more for me to see, and the stone spire of it rose among the trees to my left. Yes, here are the graves, here the worn stile, here the old lych gate. It is many years now since the little parish church has served as an actual tomb, for Boards and Councils have seen a great light on such pious practices, and what I want is out in the open under the pearly, misted English sky.

Ah, yes! “Hugo Stair, Sixth Baronet Gordon, in the thirty-ninth year of his life, *obiiit* June 27, 1861. Emma Alice, his wife, who died in childbirth, May 15, 1860. *The Lord of Hosts is with us, the God of Jacob is our Refuge.*”

The 'pothecary's daughter! Poor Lady Senna! Unhappy in her life, untruthful in her grave!

“Oh, Nana, why did you take the filthy money?” I muttered, my face hot against the lichenized stone; “why did you? I had rather have died—far rather! My poor, weak, helpless mother—you wouldn't have been ashamed of me, if *he* was!”

But even as I leaned against the cold, dead stone, a little thought like a warm, furtive flame flickered up through my grief. Ashamed of the son of the Sixth Baronet Gordon? *An apothecary's daughter?*

Alas, poor Lady Senna! I tried to think of you as mother, tried honestly, but Kitty's light laugh echoed in

I TASTE OF STOLEN WATERS

my ears—"of course she was an impossible person!" and God help me, I thought she was!

By eleven I was back in London. I had planned a letter to Mr. Geddie and was a shade displeased to be put off it by Pellegrew and Ulick, who had dispensed with the formality of going to bed and had been at cards all the morning with a certain Captain Renfrew, who had lingered along with them, it appeared, on the chance of meeting me. All Ulick's Irish blood was in his cheeks under the excitement of his pet weakness, gambling, and I, no gamester in particular, felt a sudden dash of scorn for the mercurial fellow and an idiotic desire to impress the Captain with my greater stability. They had had only some coffee and rolls since the ball, and were quite ready for the thundering breakfast I suddenly discovered the need of; so Pellegrew's incomparable fellow was sent out to the pastry cook's and down to his master's private cellar.

I can see that table now: the great "standing pie," the curry of Yorkshire ham the Captain compounded with turned-back cuffs, the plovers' eggs in aspic (got up by the Incomparable from the Prince of Wales' own recipe) and the long-necked cobwebbed bottles. The day had closed in, suddenly, a yellow, dreary fog rolled through the windows, and the chill of September in a little foretaste, sent the Incomparable to the grate. We had the curtains drawn, the lamps lit, and the bottles opened.

"This is the governor's port," Pellegrew announced; "I've no right to it—I keep it here for him, for it's all he touches—but I've prigged it for you, Renfrew, for you're the only other man in the three kingdoms who could appreciate it. Try it, Gordon? It's a wonderful thing, I believe."

THE INHERITANCE

I had discovered early in my London career that I was the fortunate possessor of a strong, sound head. In this regard I was the frank envy of my associates and not without renown among men of Captain Renfrew's age. So I matched the quiet Captain glass for glass, bottle for bottle, led on by the sardonic amusement that peeped from his lazy, half-shut eyes, conscious only that no liquid hitherto encountered by me had possessed the extraordinary, magnetic and stimulant qualities of this chosen drink of Edward Antony Cuthbert, Viscount Pellegrew, Baron Staynewayre, C.I.E.

Now the table is cleared, but for cigars and cards, and the port (there's plenty more down at Stayne, Captain—fire away! My word, Gordon, but you're a wonder—my father says no man under forty can manage a pint of that stuff!).

Now the Incomparable disappears entirely. Now a messenger is despatched for Ulick's cheque book. Now the room seems much lighter than I had supposed, and later the lamps go dim, apparently, for I have to bend to see my cards. Now Greggs brings me down my bank-book and a letter from the inside flap of the green morocco portfolio—an American letter from Hartford, Connecticut (*'ow is that last word spelled, sir?* Good Lord, how do I know? Spell it yourself! *Very good, sir*). Now Ulick is very white, and says "No, thanks, Pellegrew," and ceases to play. Now my host, who seems to be farther off than I had supposed even his drawing room admitted of, shakes his head solemnly (or is it the lamps flickering?) and murmurs, "I say, Gordon, old man, you *are* going it, aren't you? Have some soda water? I must see the States—simply must."

"It's those damn colonials—no income tax—only son. . . ." growls Ulick.

I TASTE OF STOLEN WATERS

"I hear that Mr. Gordon has more property than is commonly supposed, even . . . expectations . . . remarkable situation. . . ." Captain Renfrew ventures softly.

Now I seem to be talking. My hands are shuffling, dealing, playing a clear, steady game of cards; but my tongue is quite dissociated from them, and talks before I am quite ready for it. I am talking about Mrs. Pullfit and reading them a letter . . . we all shake hands. "By God, I believe he's outflanked them, gentlemen!" cries the Captain, still softly; "you play, I believe, Lord Pelle-grew?"

Now the viscount shakes his head. . . . "If you want to call that bay hunter ninety guineas, Renfrew,—but I hate to lose him, I swear!"

. . . What is Pellegrew saying? The steadiest run of ill luck he ever knew? Whose ill luck? Who loses like an Englishman, anyway? Who hopes to give us our revenge, later, but suppose we understand that the Regiment leaves in three days? Yes, three days—so Colonel Protheroe said. Who hopes somebody will come out to visit the Colonel and get his revenge? Who calls Greggs and says these infernal, twisty stairs will kill somebody yet and he shall write to the landlord?

Somebody asks what the time is: five o'clock, sir. Somebody puts his head on a cool linen pillow and drops into a deep, deep nothingness. . . .

I woke with a start. What! *Still* five o'clock? Was it always going to be five o'clock, now? Oh, of course, five o'clock *to-morrow*, is what Greggs meant! That is, to-day, really. And I am sorry to cast a shade of doubt upon such exemplary things as tracts and moral physiology books for schools by stating that I woke without a shade of headache, completely rested, and as hungry

THE INHERITANCE

as a bear! I was too eager for my bath and the tea that the forethoughtful Greggs had ready, to try to recall the events of the day before. And on the tray, between the sugar and cream, lay a small, pale-blue envelope addressed in a hand that sent little shivers of pleasure through my incorrigible youth and health. After a great cupful I sighed and opened it.

I sent to your rooms, but you could not be found. I suppose that when you get this I shall be—ought I to tell you? But if you *should* make an appointment with Geddie, it would only be a mile, and then we could say *good-bye*. I shall be *Mrs. Vale* there, and it is Jeanne Bruel's little cottage—my old nurse's. I shall never see that *brute* again—the *farce* is over. Oh, Hugh, why did you have them play the *Blue Danube* again? And to have to hear such words from *him*—whatever I have done—or *do*—he has driven me to—Ulick knows. But Ulick said not to see you—even for *good-bye*. You will burn this. For the first time in *years*, I feel *free!* Perhaps I had better say *good-bye* now—Kiss Stranger for me. Yours, K.

I could just get the night boat for Calais.

I had but a five-pound note in my pocket, and drew my cheque book to me as I pushed back the sleeve of my *cachemire* dressing gown.—Ah, well, it is such an old story, too trite to offer the practised reader of novels, who knows too well what I read there for me to insult him with a flat *coup de theatre!* Briefly, I had five pounds in the world, and my clothes.

You may think that I have forgotten my sensations—that time has dulled them—that I was too stupefied to realise that my living, my education, my reputation for

I TASTE OF STOLEN WATERS

responsibility were all things of the past. But you are wrong, absolutely wrong.

It is literally true that I laughed, lit a cigarette, swaggered into the little drawing room to burn the pale-blue note scrupulously, and said, with a stoicism that amazed and delighted even Hugh Gordon (late a wealthy Colonial, my masters!): "Now, Mr. Geddie, we'll see what *you* have to say!"

O barely One-and-twenty, is there any period of life to match you? Eternity is a mere whiff of time to your spendthrift, ageless audacity!

The salt wind was fresh on my face, the slap of the waves a tonic to my ears. The rapid, musical chatter was by no means so strange as I should have thought, and I found myself, after a few moments, actually comprehending an appreciable part of it. In the coach I fell into what might almost be called conversation with an affable young *commis voyageur*, and accepted his compliments gravely: if there be such a thing as a man of the world, can he possibly feel so like himself as I did that night? And under all my easy calm, my talkative high spirits, my pulses were beating like drums—*to what was I travelling, there in France, at night?*

The villas shone like lighted cardboard houses in the play. Every stage of my journey slipped easily on to the next, no mistakes, no back steps. Yes, M. Geddie established himself at the Pension Larue—below there. *L'avocat anglais*—evidently. And the cottage of Jeanne Bruel, ah, that was a good English mile, then, quite alone, beyond the *quai*, on the sands, for example. It held itself apart from the others. A beautiful night, monsieur, *au claire de la lune!* Many thanks, monsieur.

It is irrational, I know—nay, it is wrong. But I would not willingly lose the memory of that mile of sea

THE INHERITANCE

walk through the sweet, salty dusk. One doesn't walk two such miles in his life, of that I am sure. And those who try, of set purpose, to reduplicate that walk, cheat themselves and the emotions they stalk as other sportsmen stalk deer. No, no; it must be walked in good faith and but once, that mile, and if the lips it leads to are the same old lips that close on yours at the last, when all walks here are over and day and night are the same—why, so much the better for you! But this is not for every son of Adam.

The little cottage was whitewashed and glistened in the moonlight. Not a sound but the purring waves came from it, not a light but the great, full, orange moon that formed a path of shifting glitter almost to its door. The other gleaming windows seemed far away.

My feet crunched on the white sand and I walked into the shadow of the deep roof. As I put out my hand to the clumsy hasp, the door opened slowly backward, as if by magic, and she stood trembling there.

"I knew—I knew!" she whispered; "I felt you coming, but you ought not. Oh, Hugh, we are crazy! I—I never meant . . ."

"'You never meant?' Ah, Kitty!"

"Well, then, I *ought* not to have meant—I don't know why we should whisper, Hugh—there is nobody here but us. Jeanne is gone into the town to nurse somebody—some Englishman has had a seizure of some sort and she may not come back."

She was all in loose flowing white, with a scarf about her hair—like *Isolde*, only we did not know *Isolde* then. She had no sapphires, no jewels of any sort but a bangle on her wrist with a dull, blue stone on it. Her left hand is on my shoulder, and as I look down on it I see that there is no ring of any sort there.

I TASTE OF STOLEN WATERS

"Do you really mean——"

"I threw it into the sea!" she gasps, and her hair quivers under my cheek.

"And this was for me?"

"Oh you! You are a child, dearest; a foolish, hot-headed boy! I shouldn't have written—you shouldn't have come. . . ."

"But you *did* write, and I *did* come! Darling Kitty, it's no use. Wherever you were, I should have known. Look up at me!"

"I mustn't."

"Look at me, Kitty!"

"Hugh, I—I *daren't*!"

"Ah, that's better. Now, look at me!"

So at last she looks at me, and the great, secret moon, that has looked at so many of us, and must have learned to make so many allowances since she herself looked one night at Endymion, knows that we shall look no more at her nor listen any longer to the musical waters she is dragging up to us as fast as may be.

CHAPTER XV

In Which I Renounce My Inheritance

IHAD never met the Honourable George Herbert Cecil until he became the late Mr. Vale-Griffiths.

He died, as he had always prophesied, I learned, a second son, but not in any other respect, I suppose, as he had planned, for his demise was the result of an overdose of morphia, taken to calm his nerves (what he had left of them) during a jealous fury in the pursuit of his wife in her flight to France. His body was laid out in the chief bedroom of the hotel, with Jeanne Bruel in attendance, and as she bustled out on some grawsome errand across the courtyard and encountered me, dazed, and trying to digest the shock of it all, she screamed slightly and stared at me.

"Would Madame not, then, see Monsieur?" she cried, coming closer to me. "Let him not fear to approach Madame with the tidings, for one would have great wrong to pretend that she would not rejoice! Truly, except for the money, I would not serve him even to this extent! But what would you have, Monsieur? One must live, is it not?"

"I—I—are you Jeanne Bruel?" I stammered, hot and confused. She threw up her hands.

"Am I? Truly, Monsieur, I am the same as I was three hours ago at eight o'clock, when Monsieur gave me the gold piece and found from me the direction."

Here I pushed back my hat from my eyes and faced

I RENOUNCE MY INHERITANCE

her, amazed, and she stared and stammered in her turn. Pardon, it was a mistake, the sun in her eyes—"Mme. Bruel! Mme. Bruel!" a sharp, impatient voice called, and with a puzzled look at me she flew across the court.

I was too confused to note this incident very deeply. More clearly than ever before I felt the necessity for seeing Mr. Geddie at once, and even the news of Lady Kitty's release (for it was no less, from any point of view) did not seem to me to call for any change of action on my part. Directly in front of me as I turned in at the solicitor's lodgings, a lumbering provincial coach drew up, and a majestic woman, in deep black and heavily veiled, stepped with easy dignity before me into the little hallway of the *pension*.

"The English lady? Yes, Madame, all was expected, Mr. Geddie was waiting, would Madame be good enough to enter? And Monsieur again! Yes, Monsieur was to step into the outer room. Pardon—but all was in confusion with this dead English milord—one could not hold a servant in her place if one turned the back!"

I found myself in a sort of dining room, evidently, but used for business, for despatch boxes were all about. The black draperies rustled ahead of me into an inner room and I took a chair in the corner near the partition door. The house was perfectly quiet but for the low murmur of voices through the wall.

Presently the door was set ajar.

"Leave me to deal with him, your ladyship; much wiser—much wiser," said a dry voice, that sounded, somehow, familiar. Surely I had heard that voice say "much wiser" before?

"Poor Grace!" a soft, clear voice answered. "Since Sir Wilkie has heard, Mr. Geddie, he has become so much worse that it is useless to conceal it from any one.

THE INHERITANCE

His last attack brought on by rage, entirely, Lady Gordon wrote, has ended in a sort of coma, and the doctors give little hope. You knew, of course, that Hugo had been sent for."

"He is here, Lady Stacey. I have an appointment with him this morning. It was wonderfully kind in you to make such a personal effort——"

"Oh, anything I could do——! Thursday night, as soon as I saw the young man, I wrote to Lady Grace and sent it off by Lord Stacey's secretary. He handed it to her personally and brought back hers to me. They had concealed his father's attacks from Hugo, you know——"

"At my advice, Lady Stacey. There were circumstances . . . a certain unfortunate entanglement. . . ."

"Pray, Mr. Geddie, do not mince matters with me. That is one reason I am here. My son learned from Mr. Vale that—that his cousin was to be here, and I hoped that I might reach Hugo before he had seen—any one. I am his god-mother, you know, and he used to be very fond of me. But this dreadful death of——"

"Exactly. And it cannot be kept from Mr. Gordon that he will soon be the head of his family?"

"Hardly, I should think, now."

"Then . . . then I am afraid that any further coercion along *those* lines——"

"Oh, Mr. Geddie! Don't say that, don't!"

"I regret to annoy your ladyship, but I fear it is best to look the facts in the face."

"But, Mr. Geddie, this other young man—this—I don't know what to call him, but she has been quite mad about him, and we hoped so much that—dear me, it is a terrible thing to say, and Lord Cecil is my second cousin, but—oh, the harm that woman has done us all! And she was

I RENOUNCE MY INHERITANCE

such a pretty child! I promised Grace I would go and see her, Mr. Geddie."

"My dear Lady Stacey!"

"And yet, if she knows the truth about this Hugh Gordon—there *cannot* be any mistake, Mr. Geddie! You are certain that—that nothing happened in Bermuda?"

I hold my breath and sit forward on the shaky lodging-house chair. I could not have spoken to save my life.

"It can't be that your ladyship is taken in by all this farrago?" the dry voice sounds reprovingly. "The whole thing has been abominable—abominable. Had I not been unfortunately away for two months—"

"But his money, Mr. Geddie—he lives like a young prince! Lord Pellegrue told Parravale that he had lost—oh, *very* heavily, at his rooms, to that Captain Renfrew of Colonel Protheroe's regiment. And Pullfit—at Hopes-tairs, you know—is quite sick with it all. The servants are convinced. . . ."

"Aye, trust them! But I had not supposed—you will pardon me, your ladyship—that the masters, as well, were to be frightened into thinking that we were all in a play-acting scene or some parcel of nonsense in a trumpery, romancing novel! Shall I show you—"

"Oh, no; oh, no! Of course Lady Grace could never . . . but Sir Wilkie was very bitter against Sir Hugo, you know, and Parravale feared . . ."

"Lord Parravale will do well to make a long stay in the Tyrol," dryly. "And now your ladyship must excuse me, but I cannot feel that Lord Stacey would wish me to detain you longer. You are, of course, perfectly *incognito*, but every hour that you remain this side the channel—"

"I know—I know. The veil is very thick. Only I

THE INHERITANCE

hoped I might—Lady Grace and I had always planned
—”

“So I have understood, Lady Stacey. But human nature in the second generation cannot always be moulded advantageously, I have noticed. I should not advise too many hopes in that direction. Your maid is in the carriage?”

“Kedge, yes. And Lord Stacey would send Mr. Underwood—he stopped at the station, though. You don’t advise my waiting for Hugo?”

“Quite the contrary. You understand that my ankle—I am forbidden the effort—”

“Oh, pray, Mr. Geddie, pray don’t try! I insist! And I had rather go quietly out—don’t ring, please. It is only to the carriage.”

The black draperies move through the room. I follow them and we meet in the hall.

“Lady Stacey!”

She gasps softly, then throws back her heavy veil.

“Goggy—Hugo!” she begins, then steps back. “Mr. Gordon!”

“Yes. I only wanted to tell you, Lady Stacey, that you may set your mind at rest in one particular—Hugo Gordon will never marry the lady as to whom you are so distressed!”

She trembles slightly, but there is no dislike in her fine eyes.

“Oh, Mr. Gordon, go home, go home!” she says softly; “believe me, you have my—all our sympathy! Go home!”

And then, as the kind sadness in her voice and her deep black clothes fill my ears and eyes, a spring is touched, and I know that I have heard and seen her before. Her hair is gray, now, and her figure fuller than it was sixteen years ago, but she is the lady who spoke

I RENOUNCE MY INHERITANCE

to Nana in Kensington Gardens, and the little boy in mourning—why, that must have been Pat! I stare emptily at her, and even while I stare, hat in hand, she sighs softly and sweeps out into her carriage, and I never see her again. Lost in a flood of memory I stand there, and the links grow, and I realise that Mr. Geddie's voice is the voice of the pepper-and-salt suit that said “much wiser, my good woman, much wiser”—why, of course!

Ah, but he has no starved nurse and hopeless child to deal with now! Farrago, indeed! And I walk in to Mr. Gideon Geddie, solicitor. If Goggy is to come, later, so much the better. I have more than one count to settle with Master Goggy.

Mr. Geddie bowed slightly.

“Mr. Gordon?”

I returned the bow in silence. If my resemblance to the expected Hugo struck him, he did not at all show it. Nor did my ironic silence at all disconcert him, for after a moment he began to speak, in his dry, clicking voice.

“I have more than one appointment this morning, Mr. Gordon, and much unexpected business thrown upon me, so I can promise only a brief interview with you, I fear.”

“Nothing would suit me better, Mr. Geddie.”

“Precisely. My previous correspondence explains my position sufficiently, I hope?”

“Perfectly. But you can hardly expect me to be satisfied—”

“One moment, Mr. Gordon. I am able to satisfy every possible curiosity on your part, and directly. I see my clerk just outside in the street, and as I need to confer with him immediately, I am going to ask you to examine these documents in the outer room, while I do so. They are, as you will see, attested copies of the originals. For

THE INHERITANCE

many reasons you will be as well alone while examining them, and I shall be at liberty shortly to add any explanations you may request, although I am sure that your intelligence (here he shot a sly glance at me) will require very little explanation, Mr. Gordon."

He reached a packet from a stand beside him, handed it into my outstretched fingers and nodded to a freckled, red-haired, clerkish-looking man who entered upon a low knock. Even in my excitement I remembered that man, and smelled calfskin and green baize again at the sight of his freckles: he had wrapped his hand in a handkerchief, sixteen years ago, for my amusement!

The door shut between us and I sat again in my corner with three or four papers docketted together in my hand. *In re Emma Esther Palse*, was written on the outside. That, of course, would be Lady Gordon, but why call her by her maiden name? For it was dated 1860. Ah—Bermuda! Hamilton, Bermuda! Born to Emma Esther Palse, May 5, 1860, at Hamilton, Bermuda . . . aha, Master Hugo, so there *had* been a male child, then! E. Kenniwick, physician and surgeon, Esther Palse, nurse. Now, a small slip, dated at some French town that I cannot stop to make out: baptised at the English Church by the rector, Frederick Goddestow—Hugh Gordon, sponsors, two blurred English names and Esther Palse. Now, a short half page of clear, clerkly writing, pinned to a longer sheet: I read the shorter first.

Everything that Emma Palse has signed to is true. As she cannot live, I will take the child and do my best for it, as I promised my Lady. So long as the money comes regular, as they promise it will, and Lady Grace would never deceive, I will hold my tongue and make no trouble. And I know that Emma has no rights,

I RENOUNCE MY INHERITANCE

and it would only be making bad blood amongst all for no good. I will go to America and bring him up right. And Emma may forgive him, for she was always soft, but I never will. And I only do this because if it had not been for me bringing her to Little Hopemead, for the dairy work, it would never have happened.

(Signed)

ESTHER PALSE.

I begin to feel confused and dull: Esther Palse is Nana, of course, "my Lady" is Lady Senna. Then who is Emma Esther Palse? What had the apothecary's daughter to do with dairy work? I take up the long page and glance involuntarily to the bottom:

Emma X Palse (her mark), is signed there, with *Hamilton, Bermuda, May 7th, 1860*, below it:

I, Emma Palse, am saying this to be written down, which I could never write without some trouble, and now being too weak. I feel very gone-like, and 'tis not likely I'll ever be up again, say what they will. Cousin Esther tells me that the poor little baby will be strong and well, and that she will take care of him and that his people will always send money. And I know now there is no law that they must, and that I should be kindly grateful, which I hope to ever be. Her ladyship has asked to see him, and Cousin Esther is to take him to her when Sir Hugo is from home. He is not to see him. Of course I did not know he was Sir Hugo, being new to Shropshire, and Cousin Esther thought only kind when she had me from Devonshire for the dairying at Little Hopemead Farm.

'Twas because I was named for great-aunt Palse, the same as her Ladyship, and Cousin Esther thought only to help mother out, us be-

THE INHERITANCE

ing so many at home. He asked for some milk and a piece of the loaf just before sunrise, and he was shooting, and gave me a hare for jugging. So after that he came early and I was always down the first. And I was always taught right, as Cousin Esther knows, but I thought that as I had the ring and he could not go to London yet, I should get my lines afterward. He said it was often so in London. He put it on my finger and said I was Mrs. Stair, but his brother would not let him marry in London yet. It was a pretty ring, with a black pattern on it, in squares like. And then when I knew I was in that way, I was afraid and sent for Cousin Esther, and she took me on the boat here to Bermuda with them, but he did not know, for I went second, and ate with the maids. And they will never know at home, if I make no trouble, and her Ladyship has been very kind. Only it does not look to me to be right that she should lose her own baby, that would be a gentleman, and everyone glad, and mine must always be ashamed. But Cousin Esther will have him christened, only not here. And Cousin Esther say 'tis well known God forgives everyone, once they are sorry, but she never will. I forgive him, because my family will never know and I am going to die. And I loved him very much once, though not now. I am sorry about the baby.

I sat silent in the silent, closed room, the paper trembling in my trembling hand. Through the wall came low murmurs and the rattle of keys and stiff parchments. As I stooped mechanically to pick up a sheet from the floor I saw another slip: it hardly needed study, for I knew

I RENOUNCE MY INHERITANCE

what it would be. Yes: a death certificate for E. E. Palse, dated Bermuda, July 11, 1860.

The story was over, the game was played. It seemed incredible, now, that I should have thought anything else possible. As if the absurd melodrama I had conceived could have been regarded seriously in this serious old England, tied across with red tape, bulwarked with solicitors, signed and sealed on her immemorial parchments! Why had we not thought of it before—what I must be? In a flash I saw that, except for Aunt Addie, every one *would* have thought of it: what could an English nurse, single-handed, have done for a little strange boy in Warwick? Poor Aunt Addie! I recalled with a bitter grin the London paper I had mailed her after Lady Stacey's ball, with its mention of the guests—Lord Parравale, Lord Pellegrew, Mr. Hugh Gordon of Bermuda and the United States—how it must have delighted her! In one of those sardonic photographic feats of memory, I saw myself stretched over an ivied grave near a Norman Church tower, and winced at the lad who had pitied the apothecary's daughter—pity, from the nameless son of a dairy maid!

I must have sat there for a long time, but no motion came from the inner room, and slowly, but surely, it grew clear to me that there was no need of any further interview with the terrible Gideon Geddie, and that he knew it and hoped that I did. I crowded the papers into my waistcoat pocket and stole softly from the room. . . .

Only when my feet grated on the sand did I realise where they had carried me. The little cottage looked bald and glaring in the fierce light and the tide was far out and no longer whispered musically. Kitty, I knew, never rose till eleven, and as I sat in the lee of an old, half-buried boat, sun-warmed and somnolent, my head

THE INHERITANCE

fell forward and I slept that healthy sleep of exhausted youth that recuperates itself, as simply as a baby, from the shocks maturity can never meet without a lasting strain.

When I woke, long shadows stretched beyond the old fishing boat, and I felt curiously stiff. It never occurred to me that I had any other or earlier task than to tell her. My brief contact with the friends of my prosperity had left me with a keen instinct as to how I should silently slip out of those idle, happy lives: I knew, as definitely as if it had been written in one of those certified documents of Mr. Geddie, that I should never see them again, that, mercifully, our eyes would never meet. And I knew that it was better—infinitely better—so. But Kitty—ah, that was different! She and I knew how different. How could I tell her?

To my hesitating knock came Jeanne Bruel, shuffling over the brick floor. She eyed me curiously, frankly, and in silence. In silence, too, she extended a tiny, blue note.

Madame—milady was not here? On the contrary. Madame was gone. It was in the *billet*.

But she would doubtless return.

It was in the *billet*. Monsieur was to read, here, in the cottage. Would Monsieur sit?

No, Monsieur would stand.

It was all a mistake, dear Hugh! We were both mad. Try to forget, and forgive me—if you can. There is only one man who could ever manage me, and he is taking me away. We are to be married, later, after Sir Wilkie dies, and now he is to leave me—after the funeral—no one will know where—for awhile. I was nearly crazy when he went so far away, and have been

I RENOUNCE MY INHERITANCE

so ever since, I think! He would have killed me if I hadn't gone, and you, too—don't forget that, Hugh. His temper is terrible. You will not see him—he has given me a solemn promise. Pray go back to America immediately—I was mad to encourage you—everyone knows by now. Pat and Pellegrin are in Switzerland. You will soon forget me, and—I will try to be glad of it. Except for Goggy, I always liked you better than any man I ever knew. You will burn this. Good-bye—good-bye! K.

I sank on the oak stool Jeanne had pushed toward me, stared at her, and as her beady, black eyes met mine full of a curious, furtive defiance, I heard my own voice, strained and harsh, break into a cackle of ugly laughter. Once begun, I could not stop, like girls in a boarding school. Even as I choked and held my teeth together, the shrill, crowing noise would push through, and some one, waiting, detached, disillusioned, behind my brain, thought to himself: "This is the way they laugh on the stage! I always thought it was theatrical, but you see it is real, after all."

It died down suddenly, that nasty laughter, and most of my youth died with it, once for all.

I like to think that when the watchful peasant said mumblyingly:

"Madame had warned me that one would destroy the billet . . ." it was not with boyish grandiloquence but a certain dignity that I crossed the little room and thrust the butterfly, blue thing into the coals under the stew pot. "There was of course the necessity for ordering the mourning of Madame," the placid peasant's voice added.

"Of course." (Was that Hugh Gordon that spoke?)

"*Alors, c'est tout?*" said Jeanne.

THE INHERITANCE

“*C'est tout*,” said I, and gave my last loose silver into her roughened, eager hand.

“Monsieur would eat something?” she inquired, with her inscrutable, shiny eyes affably fixed on the top of my head.

“In this cottage?” I replied roughly, and left her bowing in the door.

As I look back on the next two days, what most amazes me is not the course I pursued, but my reasons for pursuing it. Is it so unpardonable that I considered, all the way across the channel, where to use the revolver that I promised myself to purchase? It honestly seemed to my boy's mind the only decent thing to do. I had no friend, no counsellor, no mistress, no money—and no name. Mine seemed too soiled and insulted a life to drag back across the Atlantic. Indeed, I believe that the only thing that carried me over the Channel was the necessity for paying Greggs! In such crises we have all of us our point of honour—and Greggs was mine. This is humiliating, heaven knows, but it is true, and I believe now that I date my first feeling of hopefulness from the day I paid that absurd, buttoned creature and felt my self-respect revive ever so little.

I paid him from part of the proceeds of the Honourable Aversham's famous “trousseau,” from which I saved out one suit of clothes only, beside the garments I stood in. Next I collected all the knick-knacks about the rooms, a certain empty picture frame; a shell paper cutter; the contents of a small box left for me and waiting my return, unsigned, unlabelled, from which, as I turned the heap roughly out on the table, a turquoise bracelet tumbled; a dog's collar set with rough turquoises. From the sale of these (all managed by the interested Greggs) I realised nearly enough to pay my small debts, as to which,

I RENOUNCE MY INHERITANCE

curiously, I was far more anxious than the larger. Nevertheless, when Pellegrew's groom left a note to the effect that his master (called from London by urgent private matters) would be glad to consider Mr. Gordon's chestnut hunter the equivalent of the little obligation existing between them, my mouth twitched in spite of myself, and I signed the printed form with the first thrill of real, healthy gratitude I had known for three days. I had but twenty-five pounds of debt, now, and on an inspiration sent Stranger back to the Old Kent Road with instructions to Greggs to do what he could. He came back with fifty pounds, and I realized suddenly that I could go home to-morrow—*home?* In the few honest, sudden tears that fell on the bare table that day, all my stubborn pride and black, bitter despair washed away, somehow, and I realised—how gratefully!—that I had only to struggle up from this (after all) my first great, slippery fall, and Life was there, waiting for me, ready to be used, if I could only use it. And all my years of sturdy, American common sense held up my head and reminded me that I, the essential Hugh, was precisely the same as though I could claim the honourable name I had dreamed of, and that my adopted country—my only country, now—would not be too hard with me, if only I could earn her respect. I was going to the land of the Individual: the land of the Family could have no more power to tempt and then crush me. It had been a boy who went to England in the first cabin six weeks ago; I believe that a man went back in the second.

The long, empty days in which I dozed and planned and watched the grey, tumbling water, dulled and softened and obliterated that kaleidoscope that had been my life in London. When I stepped off the train at South Warwick with the Doctor's faithful old bag in my hand,

THE INHERITANCE

I thought for a moment that I was the same old Hugh: I forgot the black stain and the deep gash and the dull, never-to-be-cured ache that had inevitably changed my heart from the fresh, unscarred one I took abroad. When I stood in the old study among the worn, familiar objects, and caught the delight in his eye, the unconcealed joy of his, "Why, Hugh, my boy! It's not you!" it was hard to have to cloud his pleasure, as I knew I must. Strangely enough, in all the long, broken tale that I poured out, what shamed me the most was the wicked waste of my little capital. London standards were far from me now, and I saw clearly how my education, my very fortune itself, had been gambled away on that foggy afternoon in Pellegrew's rooms.

He listened to me in silence.

Only, "Poor boy! Poor lad!" broke from him from time to time, and when I came to that night on the sands by Etretat, he patted my shoulder and told me I need not go on. My feelings when the hot, shamed recital was over, and his hand lay so kindly on my knee, have given me an enduring regard for the confessional—that real stronghold of old Rome, long after her miracles and obstinacies and blindnesses shall have been buried under the silt and slime of Time the remorseless.

"Well, Hugh, what are your plans now? For you won't leave us, of course?"

Here I felt on firmer ground.

"I had thought, Doctor, of borrowing from that college trust fund—my marks are high, you know—and getting through. I can easily make it up by tutoring next summer. Professor Wickham would send me a half dozen fellows for chemistry alone."

"I see. And then?"

I firmly believe that a direct inspiration (to use our

I RENOUNCE MY INHERITANCE

fathers' quaint phrase) came to me then. I thought, in a lightning flash, of Rob, nearly through the law school, of Hux, firmly established at the First National Bank, of Bert the unsteady, of poor, sickly Cary, and of how none of them had realised the hope of their father's heart. I thought of what he had been to me. I thought of what this generous, free forgiveness had been (for he had not one harsh word for me), and I thought of what I could do to pay him back.

"Why, doctor," I said, flushing, "if you think that this—this history of mine could be got over, I should like to put in a lot of science this year, and if there was any chance of a medical college scholarship, I could take up your trade."

"Hugh!"

His face shone.

"You don't mean it?"

"Of course, if people got to know that I had no right to my name——"

"Dear boy," he said, taking my ready hand, "I meant to do this before you said what has done me more good than if you came back with a fortune. I am all the more glad to say it now. Will you let your old name be buried in your poor mother's grave, Hugh, and take mine—ours? You are legally a child, you know, my boy, and shall we call those mistakes and—and wrongdoings the errors of the child, and believe that you will help me to keep my name clear from them?"

I think the grip I gave that warm, kindly hand meant all the words I couldn't have said to him.

It was all very simply managed. In a very few days the signs and seals and foolscap that made me Hugh Caldwell were deposited in one of those mysterious black tin boxes that swallow such things, and none of the boys

THE INHERITANCE

knew any more than that my relations with my guardians had proved unsatisfactory to me and that I had decided to help the Doctor in his profession so soon as I should be prepared for it. Only Rob made a few objections on the score of property division and expense, but when he realised that even if I failed to win one of the half dozen good scholarships open to me, I was perfectly capable of repaying any loan of his father's by tutoring in the summer, and that nothing would induce me to accept my further education on the score of adoption, he withdrew all his objections ceremoniously and even, in a somewhat patronising letter (which led me to suspect that he was not without an inkling, anyway, of what my English discoveries had been), thanked me for making up to his father his disappointment in having no doctor son to leave in Warwick. Hux was uninterested, Bert delighted and Cary noncommittal.

I felt rather ashamed when the Doctor reminded me that it would be only right to tell our plans to Nana, and hastened with him to the hospital, which had been completed and equipped in my absence. The little cottage was rented, now, all pretense of Chrissy's living anywhere but with us had been dropped when her father had left the old house in the spring for a Mexican exploring expedition, and Nana, in fresh blue-and-white stripes, bib apron and snowy cap, a basket of keys at her belt and six nurses under her matronship, seemed farther away from us than since we came to Warwick, she and I.

Dr. Caldwell had put it very simply to her, repeating his phrase of my sad little history being buried in that poor unwreathed grave in Bermuda; and she had wiped her eyes frankly and accepted his tribute to her faithfulness and silence with her own quiet dignity.

"Indeed, Doctor, I did the best I could, as Master

I RENOUNCE MY INHERITANCE

Hugh knows," she said choking, "and I'm as glad as never was that he's to have such a home!"

We shook hands all 'round and said no more: the one effort I had made at breaking her reserve had met with such immovable reticence that I had withdrawn, ashamed of the attempt, which a little consideration showed to have been cruel to her, since she had quietly admitted the truth of the documents I had brought back, adding that all of it was better forgotten, now, things being as they were.

"Good, faithful creature!" said the Doctor warmly; "you'll never forget what she's done, Hugh!"

"No, nor what you've done for her!" I insisted, and he laughed and called me his most devoted son—which, as a matter of cold fact, I suppose, I was.

I never worked harder than in the next three years. His pride was delightful to witness when I led my class and won my scholarship. Chrissy and he came up to hear my valedictory address and I hoped it covered a little of his regret about Bert, who had gone beyond all bounds in his idleness and worse, till only strict promises of amendment won him the right to come back and try an extra year—the first of the family to whom such a disgrace had ever occurred. And yet it was not wholly disgrace, for no boy had done cleverer work at Yale, in certain ways. His original compositions, besides surpassing everybody's, had been printed more than once in such a periodical as the *Atlantic Monthly*, of which treasured copies lay on Aunt Addie's table; his parodies of the different professors had been read privately, it leaked out, at meetings of the college faculty; his year on the college glee club had been marked by really artistic achievement; and the very teachers that were forced in self-respect to vote for his rustication mourned him openly. He was sent back to Warwick at Easter, when

THE INHERITANCE

I was working my hardest and had given up any attempt at controlling him. Alas, once I could have tried with a better grace! But I found that though my standards were as strict as Rob's or Huxley's again, my conscience got between me and my remonstrances. Who was I to preach temperance, chastity or economy to poor, gifted Bert? I blushed at the thought. An older man might have turned his experiences to account, but shame and disgust, fear of preaching and real distaste of the lad's sordid experiences held me back, and I could only try to come between him and consequences, and lend him more money than I could afford.

He took over the organ at St. Matthews' that summer and read every day with Mr. Applegate: the first money he earned he paid all to me, most scrupulously—it made my eyes smart, years afterward, to remember it.

I tutored some lads for Dr. Crane all that summer and drove about with our Doctor, learning much that cannot be taught in laboratories. Hux surprised us all by marrying that very parlour boarder at Miss Hoppin's who came to our last picnic (somehow, we didn't have any more), and settled down in a nice little house, full of wedding presents, and became in three months a solid family man with a great deal of life insurance. To see him a church warden was very funny. He and I had a decided quarrel over a disagreeable, shadowy rumour that floated up over Bert and Fanny Pratt, who, as a typewriter and stenographer (at that time the new discovery in the line of women's occupation), was handsomer and more reckless than ever. Bert assured me there was nothing in it, and I, stifling my suspicions, preferred to believe it and insisted that Hux should.

"And mind you, Hux," I said to him significantly,

I RENOUNCE MY INHERITANCE

"Chrissy's not to suspect anything—she has enough on her mind."

The Doctor passing us in the hall—we were driving with Mrs. Hux—caught this last sentence.

"What has Chrissy on her mind, boys?" he asked, and as we hesitated, he went on: "I'm afraid Hugh is right—Nana said something to-day. . . . I suppose she is young for all the housekeeping and nursing the child does. I wish we had persuaded her to go to a term to Miss Hoppin."

"Oh, Cary's taught her more than Miss Hoppin ever knew," said Hux easily.

"So I supposed," he agreed eagerly, "and so good for the boy. But Nana (I shall never learn to say Mrs. Palse, and I must!) seemed to think the companionship of other young girls . . ."

"Oh, bosh," Hux interrupted, "Chris always loved to putter and goody about the house, and she likes you better than girls, dad!"

"That's it—ought she to?" he answered doubtfully. "And where the child got her domestic turn passes my comprehension! The house would be dead without her, boys."

"She'll never go to Miss Hoppin," I said decidedly. "It's not the lessons, but the girls would tease her, she thinks. You see they remember what a tomboy she was, and those bloomer things!"

"But there are other schools," the doctor began tentatively.

"Oh, Chrissy couldn't be a school girl!" I cried, laughing; "she's mended and made puddings and held Aunt Addie's wool too long!"

Nevertheless the seed had dropped, and before I went off to Johns Hopkins, Nana, Bert and I had actually

THE INHERITANCE

taken Chrissy off to New York and fitted her out from a memorandum list of Mrs. Hux with a duplicate supply of that well-dressed little woman's school wardrobe. Nana's decent, respectful black, and Bert's airy aristocracy and insistence on the best of everything convinced the metropolitan princess that served us of our right to deep consideration; and truly, when I beheld Chrissy blushing in her modish *basque* and bright, scarlet-winged hat, when the extraordinary *tournure* of the 80's gave her hitherto indeterminate figure the sudden effect of womanly fashion and importance, when she dimpled at the Doctor's birthday watch and bridled under her piled-up hair, I realised suddenly that we had nearly cheated her of her birthright of girlhood.

Weeping and laughing and begging us not to forget to write, she went away from us to a famous Connecticut finishing school, and I forwarded the Professor's warm if absent-minded approval in two letters, and said good-bye in my turn. It was to be hard work for me, now, and after a year of it I was only too glad to spend my first long vacation in highly remunerative tutoring in the South. If I was not intensely enthusiastic for the work's own sake, the Doctor's delight in my honours and little successes, his pride in my announcement that another summer's hospital work would win me my diploma and send me back to Warwick a full-fledged M. D., spurred me on, and reconciled me to two solid years of absence from the place I loved best on earth, the place that had twined into my growing fibres and made me what I was —my home.

CHAPTER XVI

In Which We Settle Down

BY the time I had grown used to the "M. D." after my name on the little black sign under the Doctor's, everybody, I believe, was used to the "Hugh Caldwell" that preceded it. Indeed, I had been "one of the Caldwell boys" so long, that the whole thing seems to have made but the slightest ripple in South Warwick. It appeared to be generally understood that I had been dissatisfied with the terms of my "inheritance matters" as Aunt Addie called them, and preferred to relinquish their (presumable) advantages for the independence of American citizenship—a preference considered highly creditable to me. I had been strongly for telling Aunt Addie all about it—for telling everybody, in fact, and chafed not a little at the Doctor's decision against this.

"That's all buried, Hughie—you're my son, now," he would say quietly; "there's been enough romancing—poor Addie!"

And he always made me feel, somehow, that my proud humility would have been rather melodramatic . . . well, well, he used to throw cold water on my literary aspirations and try to make me believe I hadn't the talent for it, and maybe these very efforts prove him right!

It was such a blow to him when Robert flatly refused to take up his profession, and Huxley followed Rob. There was no chance of poor Bert, of course, and Cary

THE INHERITANCE

was always delicate. So if I had failed him—but of course I wouldn't have failed him; I wouldn't have been fit to black my humblest reader's shoes if I had failed him. I'd have been a plumber or a photographer or a missionary to China, if he'd set his heart on it. And I'm eternally glad he never knew that absurd thrill of jealousy I felt when Bert had that first little sketch of his accepted by the *Atlantic Monthly*.

Ah, well, it's all over now. I'm no writer, of course, and never shall be. Never should have been, probably, and I've never laboured under the delusion that the world lost much when my hankerings after literature were suppressed. But I believe nine men out of ten will, if they tell the truth, confess to a sneaking feeling that the career they failed of or refused or found too late would have proved their happiest field of endeavour—just as a woman is always sure that the child that died would have been her finest, the flower of the flock!

It would have been the merest affectation not to realise what I was to him. Bert had never taken his degree, after all, but had drifted into the position of assistant organist and choir master, and, with the small salary carried by this post, occasional cheques from the periodicals and what we feared to be less creditable winnings, just managed to avoid asking for more money than was harmlessly normal in his case. In spite of his uncertain reputation, he was wonderfully popular, and his uniform good temper, easy, humorous laugh and bright jokes were, as a matter of fact, the pleasantest things about the house during the few months we were together there.

For it was not a gay household, just then, it must be confessed. Aunt Addie was periodically overset with her increasing sciatica and totally unable to cope with the relays of servants that ebbed and flowed through the

WE SETTLE DOWN

house. Cary, though better tempered than he had been as a boy, was a confirmed invalid, and needed niceties of temperature and diet. Rob we scarcely saw once a year, though reports of him as junior counsel came through the papers. Huxley was buried deep in the bosom of his family—a real family, now, with two little daughters—and Mrs. Huxley unfortunately didn't get on with Aunt Addie.

"How we miss Nana!" Aunt Addie murmured querulously one evening, when only Bert's gay nonsense had rendered the half-cooked mutton endurable and the Doctor and he together had retired nearly exhausted from a struggle with the furnace.

"Nana!" the Doctor burst out impetuously, "are you crazy, Addie? It's Chrissy that sets us straight and has these two years!"

Chrissy had spent this last summer in unprecedented visiting, insisted upon by the generous Doctor, and what her loss had been we only realised when she came back to us. Nor was the reason for her coming too sad to those who knew the child's odd history, though to a stranger her double loss might well have seemed tragic.

Her father had taken to irregular absences on lecturing tours, begun, the Doctor confided to me, in his opinion, to render impossible Chrissy's frequent proposals to return and make a home for her father. One attempt at this had proved its utter failure, for the old Professor had become a complete hermit, amenable to none but the cross mulattress, and lived in a wilderness of manuscripts, oblivious to the ardent young life that seemed only to fatigue and embarrass him.

I was called there suddenly by a hasty message from Nana, to find the strange old scholar, who had always a fondness for me, and had summoned me before, in pref-

THE INHERITANCE

erence to his older friend the Doctor, in the final coma that follows severe paralytic shock. I did not dare leave him, and even as I sat by his book-piled couch, the end came. He roused himself, pressed my hand, attempted a smile, then suddenly shifted his eyes and appeared to listen intently.

“Very well, my dear,” he articulated awkwardly, “I understand—I am coming.”

And so Christopher Vereker died, and by the time we were enabled to reach Chrissy, who had gone up to one of the Adirondack camps that began to be fashionable just then, we had learned that Mrs. Vereker, that mysterious woman, had breathed her last but a few moments before her husband. She seemed to have had no definite disease, but ceased to live, quietly, with a book in her hand and an untouched tray before her, and her body, by her own desire, expressed in a letter just begun to her husband, was brought to Warwick, and they were buried in one grave, more closely united, in their own strange way, I firmly believe, than we ever knew.

Chrissy was no such surprise to the others, who had seen her, at school intervals, for two years, but I had to rub my eyes at the handsome, dark-eyed young woman whose black dress showed her firm, strong figure to such advantage, while the little white lawn bands at neck and wrists threw out the rich red of her cheeks and the smooth rolls of her abundant black-brown hair.

Her sterling good sense kept her from any morbidness of regret or grief—indeed, we all knew that the Doctor’s death would have been a far keener blow to her. The simple formalities of the funeral were soon past, and the dignified regrets of his scientific *confrères* all over the world of letters were a real pride and pleasure to her. Her mother, she confessed frankly to me, seemed less real

WE SETTLE DOWN

to her than Aunt Addie, and indeed it was touching to see how Aunt Addie brightened and improved, once she was in the house again. Chrissy finished her sentences and heard her complaints and restored her self-confidence —for it was a great shock to poor Aunt Addie to discover that the awkward, shy girl whom she believed herself to have rendered fit for society was the real mainspring of the home mechanism.

Although the Professor's affairs turned out to have been highly involved, so that for a few days poor Chrissy's outlook seemed sadly limited, the sale of some Bermuda property of her mother's and the discovery (by Hux, of all people in the world, we thought!) that the old *savant* was possessed of some highly valuable books and collections, assured her finally of a slender income that did not seem so tiny in South Warwick, when one considered that her home was, as a matter of course, with us.

Her little room at the end of the hall was no longer considered suitable, and I suppose it was the rearrangement of sleeping places, consequent to her clever suggestion of giving the Doctor a sort of secondary sitting room, opening out of the office, for his bedroom, thus sparing Aunt Addie the tinklings of his bed telephone, that set us at the complete renovating of the comfortable, shabby old house. This change, hailed with joy by the Doctor, put Chrissy into his dingy, big room, next to Aunt Addie, and left, at his own request, the great play attic for Bert. He painted and stencilled and frescoed furiously, producing in the end a really interesting, studio-like effect, crowned by the introduction, after superhuman efforts, in defiance of all advice, of the old square piano, since the Doctor, fired by the general renewing of everything, insisted on presenting Chrissy with a new, handsome up-

THE INHERITANCE

right, bought at a great bargain from a grateful patient.

The great art reaction of the 70's had reached our shores, and Oscar Wilde's discovery (for it was surely no less!) of the cat-tail and the Japanese fan, the dim, shaded "dado" (now as extinct as the dodo), the neutral backgrounds, and the severe furniture, were fresh and keen to our travelled Chrissy, and though it is past and gone now, and I visit my patients among sanitary wall tints and washable decorations, it all seemed very impressive and advanced then; and really, scattered among the good solid pieces and restful old engravings that Bert's impatient scorn could not shame off the new-papered walls, relieved by fresh hangings and crisp white window petticoats, lighted by the sun that had always had plenty of bright panes to enter by, in that south-facing house, the new "jugs and rugs and mugs," as the Doctor called them, did not look incongruous.

A beautiful service of Canton blue from the Vereker pantries banished the remnants left us by kitchen incumbents; the wicker pieces brought from Bermuda, ruffled in chintz pillows, gave a quaint continental air and made the formal "parlour" a real living room; the dozen good oils and water colours a long professional career had gradually accumulated in the way of bequests were reframed and hung by Bert, whose customary irritating idleness yielded, as always, when he was really interested, to a fit of hard working worth two ordinary men's; and unexpected treasures of old embroideries, carved wood, glass and ivory turned up from the Professor's untouched chests, and made a pleasing variety in our old routine. Carpets were torn scornfully from bedroom floors, Chinese mattings and painted wood freshened the upper rooms out of all belief; old fireplaces were unblocked and grates re-established; Nana (who could al-

WE SETTLE DOWN

ways find time for Miss Chrissy, Aunt Addie complained) appeared miraculously and consulted over lists of linen, pillows and bedroom china, and last of all the Doctor succumbed to the general fever and ordered the house and stable repainted, while Thomas requisitioned a new lawn mower and trimmed the privet hedge till his arm ached.

Chrissy was in her element, mending, polishing, listing and arranging. With Bert as head assistant she accomplished wonders, and was never too tired to play and sing for us in the autumn evenings, so that we were positively jealous of the neighbours who would persist in dropping in to see her. I don't believe that either of her musical accomplishments was of the first class: she had learned them too late for that, and was not naturally of the dramatic temperament. But her ear was true and her touch sure, and the pieces she had learned most carefully—all old favourites of the Doctor—showed in what spirit she had forced her fingers to their task. It was very sweet to us, her music, and so was her reading, which she did unusually well. In her characteristic methodical way she had spent many holiday evenings in dividing the complete works of Dickens into evening portions for the year; and Bert, always caught by the humour of such ideas, had actually ripped a set of the great novelist apart, and bound each week's reading in trim cardboard backs, lettered and even illustrated fantastically.

How the Doctor prized it! How he showed it to all and sundry guests and patients and wiped his eyes over the work on it!

Everything slipped into place as soon as she came back to us. The great bone of contention between Aunt Addie and the servants—the evening dinner—she quietly changed to English afternoon tea and a warm, late sup-

THE INHERITANCE

per, so that the Doctor, who really depended on it, for his noon eating was always uncertain, enjoyed a leisurely, nourishing meal at the end of his work; and Cary, Aunt Addie and I shared with Chrissy the midday dinner which soothed the feelings of the kitchen contingent.

She made calls, that they might be returned to Aunt Addie, too lazy and irritable now to undertake them, but vexed at not receiving them; she amused and waited on Cary; she kept my office hour (a period nobody pretended to observe) free and orderly; she filled the house with flowers; she even took over the poor patients Nana had been used to cosset for us, and all with a brightness and ease that would have been impossible for her in the bustling, practical days before she had learned to take life a little gaily. In some respects she was really younger at eighteen than she had been at sixteen, and the neat fit of her simple black, the very fall of her veil, made the rough-haired girl of past years seem an incredible fable.

How often I have come in from a cold afternoon of bicycle calls (for I insisted that I couldn't yet afford a horse, to Bert's disgust and his father's pride) to meet around the bright tea table—it was considered a snobbish affectation by much of Warwick society—warm already, at sight of the glowing logs and the steaming pot, Cary's gay afghan over his shrunken legs, for he found he could nearly always get downstairs, now Chrissy was home, and the bright crimson silk umbrella of a lampshade that alone would have made a winter centre for the house! It was surprising how the Doctor managed to drop in on his route for a hot, strong cup of his favourite Oolong (no one had ever thought to ask him if he had any tea preferences, till Chrissy found them out!), and the buttered toast and trim sandwiches he found there were often his

WE SETTLE DOWN

only meal since breakfast. Bert had fewer mysterious engagements, somehow, and played endless cribbage with his brother, and Aunt Addie's brow was smooth and her game of solitaire only a pretence at the harassed employment of old times.

We chattered and joked and the young people got into the way of dropping in, on their way from skating—ah, no wonder the Warwick *Sentinel* referred to us as “the old Caldwell mansion, that famous centre of old-time comfort and hospitality!”

And there were some of us, by then, who well knew that all this was founded on a lonely orphan, who had never known, until she created it, what a real home might be!

CHAPTER XVII

In Which Bert Pays His Score

LIKE many another man, our poor Bert was to learn that Life, that wrinkled old landlady, gives long credit to her favourites, maybe, but forecloses grimly, by and by, all the same. It was hard that just as he had settled down among us and admitted frankly that no period of his stormy-petrel existence had been so really happy—how hard it was that the old, dingy rumours about him and Fanny Pratt should struggle up from under the stacked wild oats that a steady young organist had long ago piled over them, struggle up and refuse to rot away in silence! We ignored them as long as we could, and I wonder, now, if it wouldn't have been better to have fought the whole thing out, then and there, on the spot? I wonder, now, if we couldn't have won Fanny over, and made, if not a friend, at least not an enemy, of her? And I wonder, now, how things would have gone if those curt, scornful words of mine had never been said, that Bert listened to so quietly the day after I saw him sitting on the arm of Chrissy's morris chair, murmuring to her, while she coloured slightly under those long-lashed dark-blue eyes of his?

And yet I meant well—God knows I meant well! I was sick and sore at the slow, creeping rumours and his easy disregard of them; at the happy-go-lucky way he took the easy comforts he had only begun to earn; at the selfish indulgence of allowing himself to touch her heart,

BERT PAYS HIS SCORE

that trusty, trusting girl we were all bound brothers to protect and defend—her, with that smirched record of his, that I knew even better than the poor Doctor! Was I the sorer because of a certain six weeks in the life of steady old Hugh Caldwell—Hugh, that was often supposed the oldest of the old Doctor's boys? Maybe so—though I didn't think so, then. And if it had been anybody but Chrissy! I can't describe how contemptible it seemed to me, how selfish, how intolerable! They had been a great deal together since Chrissy had joined the vested choir that was adding new laurels to St. Matthews', and their jokes and engagements delighted Aunt Addie, whose sly comments really served to put me on the lookout and turned my attention to that long look of his and her pretty colour under it.

"Aunt Addie!" I exploded, "you don't mean—Bert!"

"It would be the making of him, Hugh," she answered delightedly, "and Robert would be so pleased! He's doing so well, now, and she has a little of her own. . . ."

"Very well, indeed!" I interrupted scornfully, "and a charming use to make of the Doctor's ward! If Chrissy were *your* daughter, Aunt Addie, would you like a man with Bert's record to have her? Tell me that!"

Well, well, who's to know? To just what extent are the follies of youth important, anyway? "*Young devil, old saint,*" they say, and maybe my profession has made me a little cynical as to this and many other mottoes of like sort. Certain it is that time has softened poor Bert's past most wonderfully to me, and where I once saw the ink indelible, I only think, now, of the value of the parchment, and of all the kindly, human, winning chapters that were written there!

And who am I, to say what wisdom that parchment might have shown, in later years? When I think of the

THE INHERITANCE

old, over-scrawled vellums, tainted with what ribaldries of what ribald ages, that pious hands have trusted with the purest of gospels, I wonder, till my eyes, even now, smart and sting. . . .

Well, I said my few curt words, and heaven knows they were true, and he listened, in silence, bit his lips, and answered briefly.

“So that’s how it seems to you?”

“That’s how it seems to me.”

“All right,” he said, “we won’t discuss it any further. You’re probably right from your point of view.”

Of course he was too young not to be dramatic about it, and the next rehearsal night Carol Lee walked home with her, and in the morning her eyes were red and she avoided mine. I took a bitter pleasure in it, and when, in a few days more, even the Doctor saw that something must be done in the Pratt matter, interviewed the mother, and came home grey and old looking, I had a stiff satisfaction in answering Bert temperately.

“You seem to have been right, as usual, Hugh,” he said easily. “Fanny has a right to pick her scapegoat, of course, and I’ll do whatever my father says. It’s all I can do. But I want you to know that I’m obliged for your hint—as things turned out.”

“I spoke as I thought right,” I replied; “you know best if it was deserved.”

“Oh, it’s always deserved in my case,” he said lightly; “we can’t all hold the same views, you know.”

“The trouble with your views,” I burst out, “is that we all pay for them!”

It was so easy, in those days, to be in the right—so hard to be wise. . . .

There was nothing to do but get him away for a while,

BERT PAYS HIS SCORE

and Fanny's mother was not beyond treaty. Unfortunately the Doctor's old friend who providentially offered a place on his Colorado ranch, could not start for the West for a few weeks, and those weeks were the straw too much for Bert to bear. A young fellow just come to town to take the position of head clerk at our leading pharmacy had fallen in with him, and the slight acquaintance developed into a close intimacy, like nearly all Bert's intimacies, a little beneath him. Young Fletcher was a weakish, dandified fellow, unduly wise in exotic "cocktail" mixtures, but too much Bert's admirer, we supposed, to have any influence on him.

I like to think how we shook hands over the Colorado plan that morning, he and I, and that he said, "You know I always thought a lot of you, Hughie, just the same, if you *did* scold!"

"And I of you, Bert," I answered earnestly . . . it was really a good-bye.

The few frightened lads who saw the tragedy assured us that he was quite sober, that it was only Fletcher who had "had too much." The clerk had persisted in hiring the gayest horse in the livery stable, and only got it on the representation that Bert was to be with him—Bert could drive anything. It was all over in a moment: the plunging, backing animal, the stone coping, the terrified, helpless hands at the reins, the cry for help, the timid bystanders, the reeling phaeton. Then Bert around the corner, the despairing cry, "Bert! Bert! Help! Don't let him kill me!" and Bert, seizing the bit of the furious, rearing creature.

"Jump!" he cried; "it's all right, Fletcher, only jump!" and as the half-drunken fellow lurched out of the phaeton, only to entangle himself in the wheels, Bert left the bit, pulled him out like lightning and slipping, was

THE INHERITANCE

kicked against the stone coping. His death must have been instantaneous.

I can see them now, as they brought him home on the shutter from the pharmacy, six sobered, wry-faced lads, struggling with their sick tears. There was never any doubt or any hope. Fletcher had to be held, to keep him from the river, and I think he faced us desperately in the hope of some crazy revenge on our part: I never saw a man so changed.

“Dr. Caldwell,” he said, shaking in an ague, “this is my fault—I killed him. He was the bravest, noblest . . . and for *me*! Oh, my God, for a useless, weak devil like me! Is it prison?”

Truly, it was the most characteristic thing in poor Bert’s life, that quick, kindly death of his! He would have done it for a dog, literally, we all knew. But that brilliant, strong young existence, dashed out in a second for a vicious little drunken druggist’s clerk—it was too ironic.

The Doctor was very fine. He heard the story, then gave the abject, trembling fellow his hand before us all.

“There’s no question of prison, Fletcher,” he said gravely; “you have had a terrible lesson. If he had to die, I am proud it should have been to save a friend. Let it make a man of you, Fletcher, and make us all feel that it wasn’t wasted—I’ll stand by you.”

Nobody who ever saw the look of doglike idolatry in the drawn, haggard face will ever forget it.

It was the first *near* death we had ever known, and we crept silently about the darkened house, in that merciful, dulled busyness that few of earth’s children can hope to avoid for more than three decades. The tragedy, the swiftness, the remorse, were all strangely calming and fatalistic; there was an odd, terrifying sensation that

BERT PAYS HIS SCORE

it *had to be*, that Bert could never have gone on, somehow, like the rest of us. Only Cary was bitter.

"That he should go, and I stay here—a sickly stick of a weed!" he moaned and fought with us, and it was too true to deny, after all. It was our first taste of that inscrutable, inevitable Power that shakes our little human dice, out of the womb, into the tomb, never swerving in its mysterious aim, never yielding its implacable purpose.

"What does it all mean? Oh, Hugh, *what does it mean?*" poor Aunt Addie cried, gripped with the endless pain and pity of the question none of us can answer; and only Chrissy, white and low-voiced, calm and accomplishing everything, could quiet her.

I doubt if Warwick will ever again see the like of that funeral. The Doctor tried to keep it very quiet, but even we, who had some inkling of the difficulty of privacy, had no idea of how the brave, useless, brilliant sacrifice had fired the imagination of the town. News travels fast, and no great public character could have counted on the endless black river of carriages that followed the hearse to the old cemetery. The house overflowed, the lawn was crowded, men stood bare-headed in the street. St. Matthews' choir could not have sung, but they stood, robed and silent, about the grave that could not be seen for the wreaths and boughs; his class at Yale gathered from all over, miraculously, and marched, two by two, all the way; while Dr. Crane's boys, to whom his name was a legend for dare-deviltry and cleverness, came in a body, capped and uniformed, the old doctor, shaken, and impressive in his master's gown, at the head. Half the shops in town were closed, and the livery stable, whose owner would not take a penny from any one for a carriage, filled no other orders that day.

I have heard the burial service many times since then,

THE INHERITANCE

but never without a vague wonder why the clergyman leaves out, "*Whosoever loseth his life shall save it*"—so closely were these words connected with the *ashes to ashes*, that day, the day when the wonderful, beautiful liturgy took shape for the first time to me, as it must, I suppose, for us all at some one time, so that ever afterwards it is repetition, merely.

Cary, of course, could only walk on his crutch beside us three, and when the people realised who the fourth was that carried the coffin, a long sigh ran through the great, moved crowd, and all the eyes turned wonderingly to the Doctor, with Aunt Addie on his arm. It was poor Fletcher, moving like one in a dream, his eyes fixed and staring, beyond tears, beyond shame, a man grown overnight!

Would the crowd never cease enlarging? Children he had tossed, girls he had danced with, loafers he had flung a dime to, teachers he had teased,—and behind the Crane girls, weeping and veiled beside their sobbing mother, poor Fanny Pratt, in deep black. It was a tribute to the grave, high emotion of that strange day when little Mrs. Hux, Fanny's bitterest foe, actually spoke kindly to her and hoped she and her mother were doing well in their new home town! But there was no room for smallness, now. The remorse we all felt (for how clearly it all comes out, too late, how much we might have done, how much prevented—do we not all know it?) put us all on one grade of inachievement, one common ground of undervaluing, one rankling regret for missed opportunities of love and kindness, and if I could judge all hearts by mine, *It was my fault!* was written deep on them all.

It was a wonderful experience for the Doctor. He saw himself the father of a hero, one of the loved pillars of the town, the object of a respectful sympathy such as

BERT PAYS HIS SCORE

he had never imagined. And when we came back to the quiet, cleared, lightened house, so familiar and so changed, and ate obediently what Nana had prepared for us, while she led Aunt Addie away, we realised, together, that such experiences roll over the trivialities of every day and wash them clean of all the pettiness of years, even as his noble dying washed his life clean, and that, after all, it is only Death that binds together the living!

CHAPTER XVIII

In Which We Ride to Meet Trouble

I ALWAYS think of the next two years as a sort of gentle autumn in our lives—there is a mellow tinting, a kind of haze of quiet, falling leaves over it all, that confuses itself strangely, in my own case, with actual middle age. Indeed, I had much to age me. An unexpected gift to the hospital had put it on a vastly different footing and the Doctor, as responsible for the gift, at the head of the hospital staff. He enjoyed this work increasingly and laid more and more of his practice on me, so that I became his actual partner and set up my own carriage of necessity—we all bit our lips when it appeared, fresh and shining, at the door, that first day, at the common, quick thought of Bert and his jokes about my bicycle. Indeed, there was no day that we didn't think of him. Young Fletcher alone, who had charged himself with reporting weekly to the Doctor and came up from New York (where he advanced rapidly during a year to higher and higher clerkships in a great wholesale drug establishment), to tell of his rising affairs, would have kept us in mind, without Aunt Addie's black, or the kind, solicitous tenderness of a host of neighbours, turned into friends from the day of the tragedy.

Even Cary, who had conceived an unconquerable grudge against poor Fletcher, was wholly won over when he found that the faithful fellow was devoting his Sundays in Warwick to the slow but steady collection of the

WE MEET TROUBLE

riff-raff of town boys that hung about bar and stable, and the banding of them into a sort of loose organization for Sunday tramps and games. Every one saw and appreciated his motive, and even the strait-laced "Y. M. C. A.," new then, and many grades above Fletcher's wild and suspicious gangs, relaxed into giving shower-bath and reading-room privileges on certain stated nights, and finally gave one entire gymnasium evening, for the new game of basket-ball, to what was now known as the Boys' Club. Cary offered his services as night-school teacher, and at Nana's matter-of-fact suggestion, when the first shock was over, agreed cordially in the offer of Bert's empty studio as school and reading-room; and when the boys, to whom Bert was an absolute hero, begged to be known as the *Bert Caldwell Club*, we all, after a moment of shrinking, consented, and as we look back, now, to the results of that honest druggist's simple efforts to "even things up," as he put it, we can only shake our heads and wonder at the branching tree to which that little graft of manly penitence has grown.

Cary seemed just then in one of those periods of waxing strength that had always characterized him at intervals. He was a born teacher, and the boys in the "Club" adored him; though he spent much time in his long chair, his crutch became a cane, and I had great hopes of him. So it was a double shock to me when the Doctor called me into his office one afternoon, and between a smile and a choke, confided to me that he had given, if not a hearty consent, at least no refusal to an admitted engagement between the lad and Chrissy.

"Chrissy!" I gasped; "why—why, Doctor!"

"I know, I know," he said kindly, "but don't worry, Hugh, it can't amount to anything, and she's absolutely set on it, dear girl. He says he wouldn't dream of mar-

THE INHERITANCE

riage till he's absolutely sound, and—and if it will make him happy while it lasts . . . ”

“You don't mean——” I said, sobered, and he nodded calmly.

“Short of a miracle, there's no lookout whatever for the boy,” he said quietly, “never has been. I've had any amount of advice, and it all agrees with my own idea. He would only have sharper and longer attacks of pain. And she feels she owes everything to him—he's taught her all she knows, she told me, and really 'woke her mind up,' as she puts it.”

Whatever flash of irritation I may have felt at the first was all softened into pity, now.

“Does she know?” I asked.

“You can't tell about a girl, in such cases,” he answered wisely, “she shuts her eyes and says that she can save him. He thinks so, anyhow—look at them.”

I turned and looked with him at the group under the yellow September elms, on the lawn behind the house. Cary, in his chair, was leaning back, gazing contentedly at the russet boughs against the blue. Chrissy sat on a light rug on the grass below him, one hand held his, one turned the pages of the book from which she read aloud: her grave, full tones just reached us. His hand lay on her smooth, dark head; one of Bert's dogs was half in her lap.

“He asked for his mother's engagement ring for her—and I gave it. You—you can't blame me, Hugh?”

“No, no,” I muttered thickly, “not as things are.”

We watched them, he and I, as two men of equal age might watch children: I think he forgot utterly that I was hardly older than the poor fellow under the autumn tree. And it was like some infinitely elder brother that

WE MEET TROUBLE

I shook her hand with the diamond hoop on it, and watched her eyes kindle when she whispered.

“Oh, Hugh, he *does* need me so!”

“And you love him, Chrissy?”

I could not resist this, though I could have kicked myself, after the words were said. But she looked straight and clear into my eyes.

“Why, Hugh, how can you ask me? Not love Cary?”

I was answered—though not as she thought, dear, innocent, straightforward thing!

And so we went on another year, subdued, under the cloud of Bert’s loss and the shadow of Cary’s future, hard-working and busily happy, with it all, in what I can see now was a sort of merciful backwater before Life thrust us out into the rapids again, for our last long trial before she could give us our diplomas as able-bodied seamen! And only the gipsy who read my palm on Hampstead Heath and told me that trouble to me and mine was to come, more than once, along of horses—only she would have nodded, as unsurprised.

I was the last man to see the Doctor before the accident. He stood on the sunny little porch, drawing on his driving gloves, glancing about him in his brisk, keen fashion with those kindly grey eyes that hid so many well-filled years in their wrinkled corners. He stood as straight as he stood twenty years ago, I thought.

“Well, Hugh,” he called out cheerily to me, “coming? Still feel you can’t trust the old gentleman?”

I had to laugh, even as I caught up some letters from the mail-table, and took the reins from old Thomas. Of course, he was getting on, though. Pink as your cheeks may be, between tiny white “mutton-chop” whiskers, pink with the clear freshness of every bodily temper-

THE INHERITANCE

ance; bright and strong though your eyes may look out at us, and straight as you may stand, Doctor, with the vitality that no sickness has sapped since you were a schoolboy, sixty years are sixty years, and we know it and you know it.

There must have been a bit of this in my face, I fancy, for I can see now the whimsical look in his, as he took over the reins, ran his eye over the harness and the shafts of the Stanhope in his lightning way, and sighed a little as we started off.

"Well, Hugh, it's all right, and you're a good boy to me—a good boy," he said thoughtfully, and I patted his knee and thought (who could help it?) of Robert and Huxley and Bert and Carey, and how little they had been to him when all was said and done.

This, too, though I know I never showed it, he understood, with his abominable quickness in reading one's thoughts, and pursed his lips in his neat, trimmed beard.

"Well, well, things don't turn out as we plan, always, Hugh," he went on, "and you've found that out, no doubt, without the three score, eh? I thought so."

We slipped along—a good ten miles an hour, for Black Molly had a gait as smooth as oil—and the village street grew sparser and sparser of horses, the fields and pastures more and more frequent.

"How's this for speed?" I began, to tease him a bit, and rouse him out of a little depression I'd been sensing in him all the morning; "how much better would you do in a horseless carriage, Doctor?"

My little scheme worked. He shifted the reins to his left hand and shook his forefinger argumentatively.

"Now, don't you cry down that horseless carriage, Hugh," he began, with the good old didactic ring I had hoped for; "that man is on the right track. There's no

WE MEET TROUBLE

earthly reason why his machine shouldn't be entirely practicable. My George! it *is* practicable."

"But the weight," I insisted, "the necessary weight to carry the power! You'd break the roads, without rails. And to carry the fuel—and the awful expense—and—"

"My dear boy, remember that my grandfather was just your age when Fulton took his Folly up the Hudson," he said quietly, "and I remember perfectly what the business men clamoured then!"

"That's true," I agreed.

"And how much have you put into S——n's scheme?"

"Five thousand—about all I had clear. All the rest I have here," and he tapped his right waistcoat pocket.

I nodded. That was why I was with him, of course. A man of sixty, with ten thousand dollars in his waistcoat, driving a high-spirited six-year-old Morgan mare over a lonely country road, was not exactly my idea of safety.

Not that I didn't follow his reasoning. The property we'd come out to buy belonged to a crusty old farmer, none too anxious to sell, and especially wary of the Doctor, whose bloodhound scent for real estate was known. He knew—keen old psychologist of a doctor that he was! —that a sight of those one hundred hundred-dollar bills would clinch the bargain if anything on earth could, and he had them and the papers all ready.

"And do you really consider that rambling old hotel worth all that?" I asked him.

Again he shifted the reins. "My dear boy," (again the wagging finger) "that hotel—on that hill—facing that view—twenty minutes from two railroad stations—on two different roads—with that spring—that orchard and garden, will be worth ten times that to the man that has the sense to realize its possibilities! That place, Hugh,

THE INHERITANCE

is a Sanitarium. This country has dosed itself half way to the grave with patent medicines and cure-alls, and now its livers and kidneys and stomachs have got to get back to normal with diet and rest and open-air exercise. And where's it to be done? On hills like this. Yes, hills like this. You mark my word, Hugh, in twenty years rich patients from New York City will be rolling up that steep hill in S——n's horseless carriage, for a good German Kur!"

"At fifteen miles an hour, I suppose," I inquired sarcastically, "on a soft road?"

"Fifteen? fifteen?" he repeated. "My George, Hugh, they'll go fifty, boy! What's to prevent? You don't suppose they'll be dragging a ton of coal apiece? Why shouldn't they use electricity? Why not naphtha? Why not—whoa, there, Molly! steady . . . steady . . ."

For Black Molly shied violently, and we drew up, the Doctor humouring and soothing her as she crabbed half across the road. Like most good horses, she loathed shapeless, huddled masses by the wayside, and this was a man, a hulking, bearded fellow, shabby and dirty and half drunk, by the look of him. An old forage-cap was crowded down over his mat of hair, almost covering his eyes, and as he staggered up and put his grimy, black-nailed hand on the rim of the wheel and growled out something about the price of a bed for the night, I was tremendously thankful I was with the Doctor, I can tell you, for he was a six-footer and more, and an ugly customer at that.

"Get away, there, will you? You'll be hurt!" I cried angrily, as he took Black Molly's bit with a clumsy pretence of making himself useful; the clean, dainty beast tried to toss herself free of his dirty paw disdainfully.

"Won't yer gi' me a quarter for a bed, boss?" he

WE MEET TROUBLE

whined. "I'm a poor man, that can't drive my blooded stock——"

"It's a poor man, indeed, that can't work for a living, with your youth and strength," said the Doctor sharply; "let go my horse, sir!"

"Look here, boss, I've got to have a quarter," the man droned, half supporting himself by the bit, now, and I believe it was greatly rage at the sight of the mare's tender mouth drawn away that made the Doctor raise his whip and cut the fellow across the cheek, so that he howled with pain.

Molly jerked herself free, but not soon enough for us to escape the torrent of vile abuse he hurled at us.

"To hell with you, you damned stingy old brute!" he bellowed after us; "I'd slit your old throat for a nickel, I'd——"

And even more unsavoury were the last sentences we heard.

"Faugh!"

I can see the Doctor now as he shook himself slightly, as if to scatter from his immaculate white duck waist-coat (he never was seen without one) the slime of that spattering drunken tongue. He was singularly neat in his person; the jealous young physicians in the town—who had him to thank for most of their practise, by the way—called him "Dr. Dandy," and "Brummel, M. D." As he had not varied the fashion of his clothes in thirty years, I suppose them to have referred to this spotless vest, with his shining boots, well-kept hands and close-trimmed beard, that showed, in his rarely wide smiles, teeth as clean as a hound's. He wore no jewelry but a heavy seal ring that had been his father's, and a thick-linked, respectable watch chain with a curious Roman coin, of great but unsuspected value, swinging from it. It

THE INHERITANCE

had been the grateful gift of a wealthy patient and life-long friend, and was stamped in almost effaced Roman characters with his initials, R. C., and had been pronounced by experts to be without a duplicate in the realms of numismatics.

His tongue was as clean as his teeth; I never in my life heard a questionable word from him. His favourite expletive ("My George, Hugh, I can't see the good of profanity!") was one of his most lovable characteristics to us who loved him—why is it that our affections are so often caught by these trifling earmarks of personality and so seldom by the academic good points of our friends?—and I believe that what hurt him most when Bert was brought home from his first boyish debauch was the trickle of stained words that the rest of us took as the least of his offences.

"I gave him a hard cut, I'm afraid," he said after a moment.

"No more than he deserved," I answered shortly. "He might have been responsible for a very pretty little runaway."

"Molly's restless to-day; she always feels the thunder coming—like me," he added.

"Thunder? We're practically in November," I reminded him, but he only smiled and shook his head; he was a perfect barometer.

And just at that moment there came a low mutter, and Molly pricked back her ears and the dead leaves whirled in my face, and one of those curious, haunting certainties that I had experienced all this before swept over me. Somewhere, somewhere, surely I had said to somebody, "Thunder? We're practically in November," and the brown elm leaves had whirled against my cheek. It was uncanny.

WE MEET TROUBLE

The sky grew steadily darker. We drove in silence, and I no longer tried to raise him from the depression I had felt in him, for it was creeping insensibly over me.

"If this blows up, I'll turn back; I don't relish taking her through the Millpond woods in a thunder storm," he said at last, and I agreed briefly. We all wished he were a little less exigent in the matter of horseflesh; the traditional jogging old grey of the country doctor would have given us more peaceful hours than Black Molly or her predecessors had ever allowed.

"So we'll be taking back the money after all, Hugh," he said at last with a glance at the sky, very thick by now, and fairly menacing behind the angry flying leaves and the bare boughs. "By the way, has Chrissy any cash at all? I'm pretty low at the bank."

"She found fifteen dollars in your shoe-pocket," I answered demurely, "and a coffee cup full of small change behind the dining-room mirror. Then there was that ninety-six dollars she collected last week—the old bills, you know."

He couldn't help smiling.

"The little rascal!" he muttered; "but look here, Hugh, she mustn't be too hard on anybody, you know. By the way, I stuffed some money under the clock in the office."

"I don't think she will," I assured him drily. "Chrissy's quite right about the bills. You have no more idea what people owe you, Doctor than—than they have. But she's going to find out. And then, she says, if you really want to give it in charity, you can do it a little more evenly. We really need new carpets, you know, and Thomas says he can't possibly humour the furnace through another winter."

"She's been stuffing you up with all this, I see," he said, not displeased, though, and with the smile he always had

THE INHERITANCE

for Chrissy. "Well, the child has a level head—a level head. And you're backing her, it seems."

"Oh, yes, I'm backing her," I answered simply; "I'm always backing Chrissy, you know."

He chuckled, then grew grave suddenly.

"She's growing a fine woman—a fine woman," he said, "soon we'll have to take her seriously, for she'll make a fine woman, Hugh."

I almost got my hand on the reins.

"Why, Doctor," I cried, "she'll make? she'll make? She's made it! She *is* a fine woman, Doctor!"

He gave a little gasp, and as I looked at him, his cheeks actually seemed to fall in and his eyes sink back in his head.

"My George, Hugh!" he murmured, "my George! I'm sixty-one years old! Sixty-one, and Chrissy's a woman! And I was a middle-aged man when I helped her into the world!—Do you think she'll help me out of it, Hugh?"

"Don't talk that way, Doctor, don't!" I begged. "Of course, she's only a girl . . ."

"No, no," he checked me, "you don't need to eat your words, my dear boy, you don't need to. You're quite right: she's a woman."

A great fork of lightning branched across the sky, and as Molly reared and shook her head, he turned her abruptly, cramped the wheel very short, and headed for home. I didn't answer him, for I couldn't. There was a pause. She slowed to a walk, and the leaves dropped and rested on her glossy back and the wind began to rise and moaned a little: the boughs had an autumn creak.

I remember how that next flash lighted everything with a nasty green glare; he had a hard time with Molly, and I was within an ace of helping him, a thing he never

WE MEET TROUBLE

would have forgiven. But he got her under, somehow, though I could see it had taxed him terribly; his breath came short and I felt his knees shaking, against mine.

But never a drop of rain; only the rustle of dry leaves and the black clouds bearing down on us.

Then it all happened in a moment. The very dome of the heavens cracked and split and roared; Molly gathered her legs under her and jumped like a rabbit; a gust of cold wind blew the lap robe out of the Stanhope, and in an involuntary movement to catch it I lost the second when I could have helped him with the reins. The wagon swayed and lurched, and as that frightful crack and roar came again and a great oak near us ripped down the middle like a tearing sheet and fell close to her head, Molly gave a positive scream and danced in an ecstasy of nervous terror sidewise across the road. The light vehicle dragged stiffly after her a moment, then the near shaft snapped, the wheels tilted and my side sank down.

"Jump! Jump, Doctor!" I cried, and tried to push him as I fell.

But his hands seemed welded to the reins; he only stared ahead of him.

I was wedged between the wheel and the dashboard. I remember thinking that it was all over with me, probably, and wondering if Chrissy would find the money under the office clock, when Molly swerved again and, backing violently, threw me out, heels over head, as helpless as a doll.

Everything went bluish, and I saw a bolt of fire as big as a child's head floating across the road; little tingling shocks ran through me, and clicking, snapping noises filled the air. Molly was staggering and backing, and the swaying, lurching Stanhope reeled menacingly, like the rough man we had met just there a little while ago.

THE INHERITANCE

I heard the swish and fall of big trees, beyond in the woods, and the grinding of the boughs; it sickened me, somehow—it was like human bodies crushed and creaking . . .

I crawled up the bank, almost crazy with joy to see Molly still backing and staggering; she had not advanced a yard, and he still sat there, glued to the reins, staring ahead.

“I can get him out!” I cried aloud; “hold on, Doctor, I’m coming!”

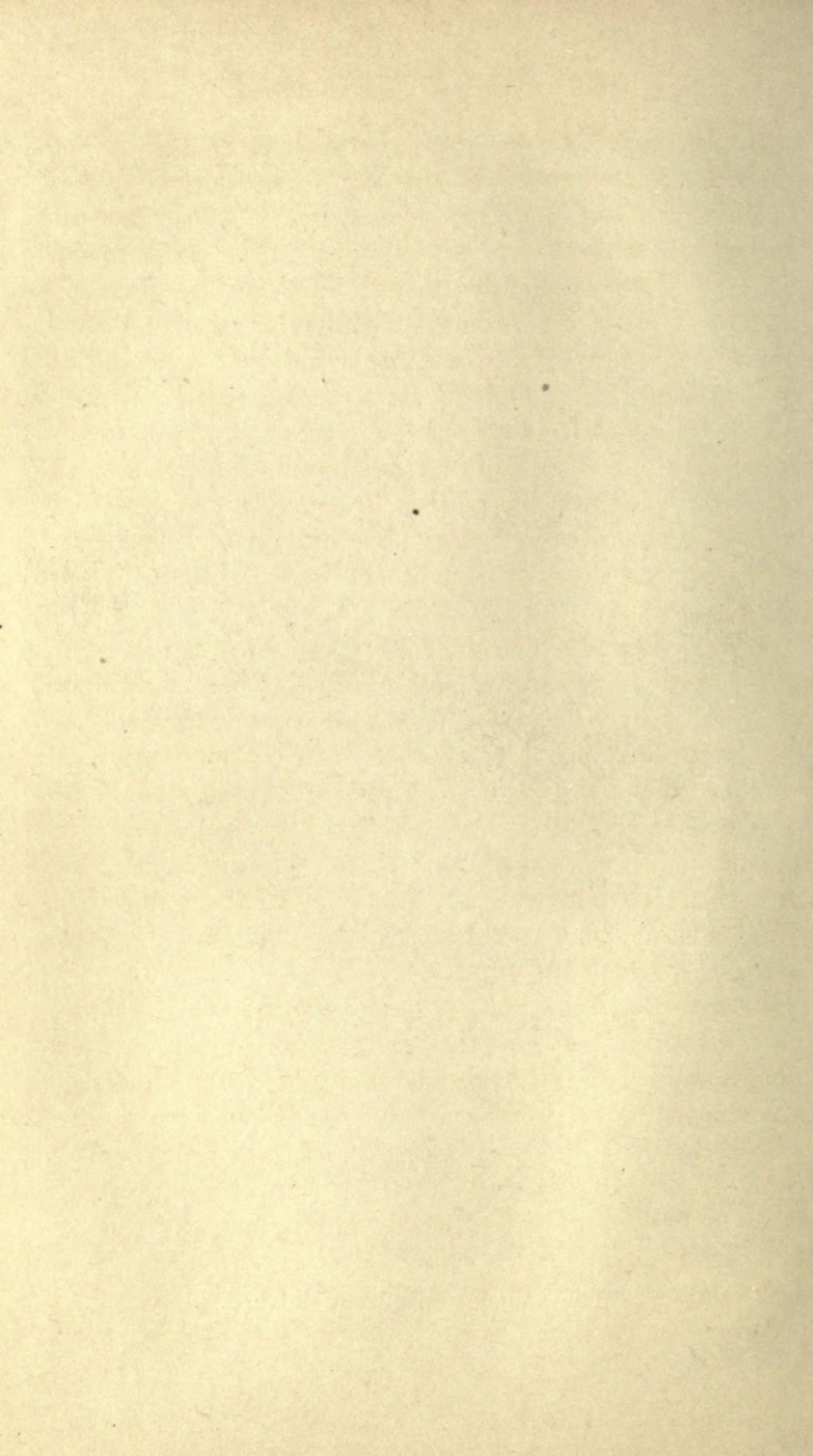
But my legs moved slowly, as in those terrible dreams that haunt us so dreadfully, and she started suddenly and broke ahead just as the tramp rose again from his old hollow by the road. He was wild with terror; his eyes stood out of his head. He gave a howl like some great, dying animal and waved furiously with his ragged arms, and then I saw that the ball of fire was drifting like a balloon towards him. The blood was still dripping from his hairy cheek, where our whip had cut him; he looked like a nightmare.

It was the last straw for Molly, and she bolted like a shot, the wagon struck a great stone on the side of the road, and then, as the entire sky opened, a frightful lemon-coloured well, and blue points of fire spurted from the steel rivets of the Stanhope, the Doctor pitched from the bounding seat and was thrown hard against the bellowing man. His hat flew off and I heard the crack of skull against skull—“it’s concussion,” I thought, in one of those timeless flashes of the brain, “and he can’t possibly stand it. He’s gone.” Then a crash of noise that swamped thought and life and everything, the top of my head seemed to lift off and up, and as they dropped together, I went out in a gulf of black noise.

* * * * *



"The wagon swayed and lurched."



WE MEET TROUBLE

I came to myself slowly, expecting obstinately to see the white walls of a hospital ward. It was perfectly clear to me that I had just been operated upon by the Doctor and myself, and soon, I knew, the head nurse would swim into the vague circle of trees and all would be plain.

"I *think* these are bushes and rocks, but of course they are walls and beds," I said to myself calmly, when all at once a veil seemed to roll away, and I knew the surroundings for what they were and tried my limbs painfully. All seemed sound; my neck and shoulders were a bit stiff, and I had the general bruised, bent misery that follows acute nervous shock, but otherwise I was perfectly fit, and I got up slowly and went haltingly across the road.

Molly, of course, was gone—as clean away out of sight and sound as the black clouds and the blue lightning. Only the deep ruts of the wheels, in horrid, blurred circles, witnessed her performance of—how long ago? I could not tell; I judged from the sky it was about half past four—we had started at two. I walked quickly to the roadside; as a matter of fact, I had no hope. No man of sixty could take such a blow on the head and live. One body lay, limp and straight, in the hollow—the Doctor's. There was no sign of anyone else.

I knelt by him and put my hand over the heart. Nothing, of course. I turned the head partly over and nodded quietly at the frightful, discoloured area I had expected. I was kneeling by the body of the best friend I had in the world, the man who had made me whatever I was, and I could do nothing for him. I don't think I exaggerated when I felt that I would gladly have given the rest of my natural span for the years he would ordinarily have rounded out. You see, I was a grateful sort of fellow.

Whatever revenge the tramp might have been tempted

THE INHERITANCE

to wreak on an old man in his power, he had been spared the trouble of. That was something to be grateful for, at least. I shuddered to see the blood from that whip-lash smeared on the Doctor's neck under the ear. It was rather gruesome—and yet he had acted well within his rights; the man had meant mischief, beyond a doubt. Then something occurred to me, and I put my hand into his waistcoat pocket where I had seen him put the money and the papers. Only the papers were there.

"Watch gone, too, of course," I muttered, but saw with surprise that it was still in its place, though the chain no longer lay across the white duck, and—yes, the Roman coin was gone.

It seemed incredible; the watch was of obvious value, the coin a dull, coppery looking affair, its very ugliness its safety. How had it caught the eye of that drunken, lawless fellow?

"I can't leave the body here," I thought, slowly, for my mind creaked on its hinges, and things came slowly to me, "and yet I must tell Chrissy—it must be me. How far could I drag it?"

I sat, a rather pathetic figure, I should suppose, squatting beside him, my hand still over his heart, when all at once I jumped and gasped, for I felt a weak, fluttering throb under my wrist—the pump I had distrusted so was starting up again! I put my cheek to his lips—surely I felt something? Shaking with excitement I loosened his collar and felt for the tiny pocket case of hypodermic and stimulant he always carried; it was there, unbroken. I moistened his lips and chafed his hands, and at last he swallowed feebly. What splendid vitality he had! I moved his arms and legs tentatively—they seemed supple. The spine I dreaded to touch, but there was a puddle of stagnant water a few yards off, and I

WE MEET TROUBLE

had a compress on the frightful contusion of the head in less time than I had thought possible. Again and once again he swallowed, and then, catching sight of the red stable blanket across the road, I fetched it, and with set teeth lifted him onto it; it seemed to me, though I could not be sure, that his back was all right, but it was almost too much to hope, I thought. His eyelids quivered slowly, slowly, and at length, as I held my breath, lifted, and his eyes focussed vaguely on mine.

“That’s right, Doctor,” I said cheerfully. “How goes it? Feeling better?”

Still they searched stupidly; his eyes, and something—I don’t know what—chilled me as a small, cold draught of air chills a hot body. Of course, I couldn’t expect him to become perfectly conscious all in a moment, but it was something more than that. . . . I looked hard at him, and as the mind struggled back to those clouded eyes—blank as the windows of an empty house—I leaned over him.

“Do you know me, Doctor?”

The old question—how many times have I not asked it! Other men of my calling may grow indifferent to it (though most, I believe, do not), but for myself I have never asked it nor heard it asked without a thrill. Do they know us? Has that absent something returned yet? Has that rolling pupil, blank in its iris, connected yet with the wonderful, delicate cord along which the visible, tangible universe flashes its messages to our flesh and blood?

“Do you know me? Do you know me, dear?” The sick, faint odour of chloroform too often chokes that question on their lips, those trembling wives that press between us and the narrow, white bed, and we know the seconds are hours to them, the minutes eternities, and

THE INHERITANCE

pity them from our hearts while we ask calmly, "Is this your watch, nurse? Oh, yes. No nourishment for several hours, of course."

"Will she know me? Oh, doctor, will she?" How they peer under the swathing too-white bandages that cap the little faces, too white themselves, also, and press their hands over their poor, pounding hearts, those agonizing, thrice-pitiful mothers, pressing down and squeezing out the last drops of that cup of anguish mysteriously prepared for them from the beginning, coining their tortured breasts into counters for some child's thriftless spending, by and by . . .

And then that strangled cry, that racking joy, as the little lips quiver and the eyes faintly light into theirs—

"She knows me, doctor! *She knows me!*" And we murmur soothingly and the nurses bite their lips and breathe deep . . .

Well, I asked the old question, the few perfunctory words that lead, like most well-worn phrases of the sort, down into the very deeps of life, and I asked it sharply, and with a voice changed even in my own ears, for I knew, as I asked it, that those eyes were conscious, that the great connection was made, the mighty circuit that separates you and me from the imbecile and the inorganic, completed—and yet, he did not know me! He did not, and I realized this *and he realized it*.

He turned his head feebly and winced.

"Don't try to move," I said mechanically. "I've put a compress at the base of the brain; you had a nasty fall. But all right otherwise, I think. You remember, don't you, Doctor?"

His jaws moved once or twice, and he made a rough

WE MEET TROUBLE

sound in his throat. The blood was in his cheeks again, and with every heart-beat he was manifestly stronger; he clasped and unclasped his fists, and deliberately moved his feet from the ankle—the spine was safe, then.

"Come," I urged, and now I was sure my voice was sharp and high, "I'm sure you remember, Doctor?"

He coughed. Then:

"To hell with you, you damned stingy old brute!" he cried hoarsely, and then as I fell back from him horrified, he ground his teeth and tried, his eyes flashing unmistakable hate at me, to raise himself.

I watched him sink down again and heard him cough feebly, without offering to touch him. I could not have moved just then had he died before my eyes. For again that tiny cold draught blew across me, and I shivered to the marrow.

At last I forced myself to approach him.

"Let me put back the compress," I said dully, "and lie still. You will hurt yourself—"

"For a nickel I'd slit his old throat!" he snarled at me, and then, as the torrent of filth that the wind had carried to our ears along the road, two hours ago, rolled over me again, the little hairs on my skin pricked me as they crawled upright, and I stared dumbly at him, for I was not listening to a madman nor, I would have taken my solemn oath to it, a man temporarily deranged, but to a man that did not know me!

He saw my fear—I must have been ashy—and did not share it. His lips curled back wolfishly (the horror of that grimace on those lips oppresses me still, in the night), and he tried again to rise. For the first time he dropped his eyes and looked at his hand, white and well kept, with the big old seal ring on it. The most inde-

THE INHERITANCE

scribable look came over his face, and he stared blankly at me with the dropped jaw of an idiot.

It was too much . . . I heard the rattle of an approaching wagon, stood up and waved my arms, somehow, and fainted in the road.

CHAPTER XIX

In Which the Doctor Gives Up Driving for Some Time

IFIND I am hesitating, so reluctantly, to take up this part of my narrative, that I had best get at it at once and be done with it. You will have to know it—and Chrissy will have to know it, and I must break the news in both cases. So it is just as well that I came to myself as quickly as I did, with two frightened men bending over me, and the echoes of that horrid raving still in the air.

“Drink a drop of this, doctor,” said one, and the other added:

“I’ll get the old Doctor to swallow some, too, if I can. He’s in a pretty bad condition, I guess. It was that black mare, I suppose?”

I knew them directly: they were the undertaker’s head driver and his assistant, and behind them stood the tall hearse with its ornamental tops like a four-poster bed and its discreet pleated curtains. Two big, heavy blacks drew it, with long manes and tails, and they stood decorously in the road where Molly had pranced and pawed. They were proof against any storm that ever brewed, I knew.

The raw brandy stung me awake, and I motioned them to keep it from the Doctor.

“He’s had all the stimulant that’s safe, I think,” said I, coughing. “The thing is to get him home without jarring, if we can. He—he’s completely out of his mind.

THE INHERITANCE

It's partly electrical shock—you see the boot soles are blackened. The fluid must have gone straight through him. There's a nasty contusion, too. Have you got anything inside there?"

"No, sir," said the driver respectfully, "we're just back from Millpond Crossing—old Captain Banks's funeral. There's a few chairs inside, but they're all in bags, and there's plenty of room. Has he been conscious since it happened, doctor?"

I went over to him a little unsteadily but, to my relief, he lay in a stupor, breathing heavily, but quiet.

"He was conscious for a moment," I said, "but relapsed again, just—just as I did. See if we can lift him in the blanket. I'm afraid I can't help you much."

They got him in very deftly, on the whole, and we tied back the doors for air, and I sat cross-legged with his head on my knees, and the blacks paced slowly along. It was the most disagreeable drive I ever took in my life. I have seen too much of death to be afraid of it, and a hearse, *per se*, had at that time no personal associations for me, but it is not a pleasant vehicle, all the same, and as I sat there, cramped and frightfully uncomfortable, my old friend's bandaged head so heavy on me and his stertrous breathing, like a rattling machine in my ears, which still echoed with that flood of ribaldry; as my mind pictured with the remorseless accuracy of the photographic lens that look of idiotic horror as his eyes had fallen on his white hand and the seal ring, I tell you it was all I could do not to scream out like an hysterical woman.

From time to time we stopped, and one of the men got down to inquire if everything was all right, and at the main fork of the road he turned, to my surprise, in the wrong direction, so that I rapped sharply on the glass to stop him.

THE DOCTOR GIVES UP DRIVING

"Look here! Where are you going?" I cried testily, for the Doctor was beginning to moan and writhe a little and his pulse was quickening irregularly.

"Why, don't you want to take him to the hospital?" said the man quickly; "it's a good mile nearer, doctor, and I thought every minute counted."

"Right you are, of course," I answered after a second's worry, "and push the pace a bit, Henry—he's getting restless. Try a trot, and I'll tap, if it's too much."

It was none too soon: he was muttering, presently, and struggling feebly, and by the time we had pulled up at the high horseblock and an orderly and two doctors could get out to us, it took four men to carry him, raving, cursing and kicking, into the building.

The out patients heard and crowded to the door of their waiting-room; he was due for an hour with them—and here he was, but worse off than any of them, and they fell back with white faces. The nurses rushed from the wards (he was a great favourite with them) and Nana herself, her keys rattling from her belt, her good English face ruddy above the striped blue-and-white of her uniform, hurried in from her little office on the ground floor. For the first time in years she was shocked out of her official demeanour in public, and ran to me, her hands over her ears to shut out that horrifying, pelting obscenity, so incredible from those calm, clean, friendly lips.

"What is it, Hughie? Oh, my lamb, what is it?" she cried, shaking, and even though I glanced reprovingly at her, I put my arm over her shoulder: they all knew who she was.

"A private room, at once, Mrs. Palse," I said quietly, and to the head nurse, who appeared just then with eyes like saucers, I added, clearly, so that they might all hear:

"Delirium, from electrical shock and severe contusion,

THE INHERITANCE

He got a terrible blow at the base of the skull. Telephone for J——y from the city directly, and wire Dr. B——n at New Haven: I'd like them to consult."

Nana was herself again, directly—more so, indeed, than poor Miss Riggs, the head nurse, who had been in attendance under him at an operation that morning; the poor girl's lips twitched nervously, and she steadied herself by the newel post as she started up the stairs. It was a black day for the hospital.

I lingered in the square, bare hall that smelled so persistently, if faintly, of anæsthetics and disinfectants—odours that not all the flowers presented by the Ladies' Auxiliary could quite kill—trying to think what I must do first: should I sit by him or warn Chrissy? Such news travels all too fast, and there was no immediate danger of death, apparently; he was stronger than one could have dared to hope, and no concealment of his condition was possible, now—the vile words floated down clearly at this very moment from the little lift they were taking him up in, and in his clear barytone, penetrated the place. I could not shield him in that way, or I should not have left him for a moment. One of the best doctors in town had hurried out on our arrival, and Miss Riggs was most efficient—yes, I would go and tell Chrissy and the boys, for she must not come to the hospital.

"Tell Dr. Hunter I've taken his rig—I'll telephone from the house in ten minutes!" I cried to the second orderly, who came hurrying in from the men's ward, and jumped into the buggy near the side entrance. And I knew, as I drove off, that I left him with relief. I was glad to leave the best friend I had in the world to the care of others!

CHAPTER XX

In Which I Break the News to Chrissy

WHEN I pulled up at the comfortable old red house with the white, ribbed Doric pillars (Chrissy had set Thomas at the leaves, and the lawn and drive and walk were neatly swept, the shrubs banked, straw tied about the rose bushes, and the roof gutters clean; the whole place looked trim and creditable to a degree, and she had had the fence painted the week before) the door flew open and she hurried out with Thomas at her heels.

"How is he—better? Is anything broken? Are they bringing him here?" she cried eagerly.

"Why—why, how did you know?" I stammered, immensely relieved, I can tell you; "(blanket the horse, Tom, and keep him here, I'll be going back presently), yes, he's stronger than any one could expect. Who told you?"

She stood by the gate, with the wind blowing her smooth, strong hair into heavy wisps about her cheeks. They were flushed, and her eyes were very bright, but I knew the deep white she had looked at the first shock and how black her eyes must have turned against it: excitement always took her that way—quick pallor and then the flush and her wits working at the double-quick—that was Chrissy.

"Molly," she said simply; "she came home with the Stanhope all down on one side and the reins dragging. They caught her at the corner, and I called up the bank

THE INHERITANCE

and the livery stable and the hospital. Rob was at the bank. They sent six teams out in different directions, and Rob and Hux telephoned everywhere. They traced you to the Millpond road, and then that undertaker's Henry called up the bank. Rob started for the hospital, and I got everything ready here in case you brought him. Hux had to stay at the bank—he's all alone there. I didn't think it would be right to worry Cary. Can't they bring him here, Hugh? Miss Riggs told me there was nothing broken, so far as they could see—only that blow on the skull. Nana said she'd never leave him till I got there, in case they couldn't bring him. I'm all ready."

The good, brave thing! It nearly broke me down, she was so sensible and steady—though I knew she was strung up to concert pitch, inside. Nothing undone, everything "seen to," as they say in South Warwick, and that quiet ending—"I'm all ready"—I could have wagered my last penny that she was.

She wore a bright red bodice, a sort of tight-fitting affair that showed every line of her firm, strong-knit figure: didn't they call them "jerseys" then? There was a stiff little white collar at the top, like a man's, and a little trig black bow to finish it off, and stiff little cuffs came down to her wrists: the cuffs were masculine (at least, it seems so now, since the women don't wear them any more), but somehow, when a round, dimpled wrist showed at the end of such a cuff, the contrast brought things to your mind, and I don't think the ladies lost by it at all. Her upper arm—the weak point usually in those of her sex who are not washwomen—was wonderfully modelled, full and round as a statue's, and the line of her breast and shoulder, unmercifully revealed by that red jersey, was like some wide-browed Juno's.

"Miss Vereker is not beautiful, but she has a fine fig-

I BREAK THE NEWS TO CHRISSY

ure, if you care for that kind," the ladies of South Warwick used to say, and I, and many others, were quite frank to admit that we did care for that kind. Aunt Addie thought her a trifle heavy for her age, and used to advise her to drink a little good cider vinegar three times a day and not to take twice of the beef, my dear, but the Doctor and I had something to say on that point, I assure you.

"I think perhaps he's better at the hospital for a little, Chris," I began—"the jar, you know . . . I'll see how he is when I go back."

"But I'm going, too, Hugh?"

"I think you'd better stop here, dear, for the present."

"Hugh," she said, looking hard at me, "what's the matter? You don't have to lie to me. Is he going to die?"

"On my honour, Chrissy, I don't think so," I assured her hastily, "and I don't mean to lie to you—you know that. The only thing is, he's—he's out of his mind, for the moment, and he wouldn't know you, if you were to go. The shock, you know—it often acts that way. He—he doesn't talk like himself at all, and it would be a terrible blow to you."

She drew her eyebrows together and looked at me under that straight dark line.

"Why would it be a blow to me, Hugh, now that I know about it? Nana heard him."

"Yes . . . but Nana is an older woman. And it did shock her, for the matter of that. Didn't she give you any idea of it?"

"No, she only said he was very bad, but no bones broken, they thought. I don't see what age has to do with it."

"Look here, Chrissy," I said, swinging the gate back

THE INHERITANCE

and forth nervously, while old Thomas listened with all his ears, "I want you to take my word for this—won't you? You'd be everlastingly sorry to have to remember the Doctor as he is now. Those shocks act very queerly, sometimes, and though we all understand that he's not responsible, fast enough, some of the things he says you've—you've never heard in your life, and you don't want to. He'll probably get quieted soon, and then, the minute I think you wouldn't regret it afterward, I'll call you up and let you see him. Won't that do?"

"Do you mean he swears, Hugh?"

"Yes," I answered, relieved, "he swore terribly when he came to, and he kept it up. It was a great shock to Miss Riggs, I can tell you, and she has to hear that sort of thing, you know, in the wards. But I tell you very plainly, Chris, I wish *I* hadn't heard him."

She looked undecidedly at me.

"Honestly, Chrissy, if—if anything should happen, you shall see him, you know. I wouldn't keep you from that. But if he's alive now, there's no reason that I can see why he shouldn't keep up longer."

"Honestly, Hugh?"

"Honestly, Chris. Surely you can trust me? It's only for your sake, really. I don't want you to have it to remember, don't you see?"

She drew a long breath.

"All right," she said quietly. "I'll go in to Aunt Addie. Of course she's dreadfully excited."

"Of course," I assented. "I'll step up to her a moment, and telephone before I start back."

And that was all there was of that interview I'd dreaded so. It is often like that: the worst things come with no warning, and I'm not sure one doesn't bear them just as well. And when one is all braced for the ex-

I BREAK THE NEWS TO CHRISSY

pected, it doesn't happen. Not that many girls would have yielded like that. It was a terrible disappointment to her, I knew. But she was too good a manager herself not to know when it was best to let others manage—the best test, especially in women. Now Aunt Addie, at her age, would have insisted.

I called up the hospital, and left the two women together: Chrissy could always manage Aunt Addie, and she was very tearful and trembling, poor old lady. For Aunt Addie was not young, fifty-eight, though she didn't look it for a minute. But a shock of any kind always showed up her age.

"How is he—still the same?" I asked the doctor who answered my call.

He seemed to hesitate.

"No, doctor, I wouldn't say he was quite the same. Less violent. We've got him in bed and the head all dressed and got a little sedative down, I believe—he fought that. The heart is holding out wonderfully. There's a good deal of incoherent muttering. We've got the delusion fixed, now—he's sure he's somebody else. He says he's 'on the road.' Miss Riggs seems to have the best effect on him—he hasn't recognized any one yet. Mr. Robert Caldwell is quite discouraged about it. I've told him it's not unusual at all; that is to say . . ."

"Oh, yes, of course," I cut in hastily. "Well, I'll be right up. Can J——y and B——n get here, do you know?"

"J——y's on the way; Dr. B——n will come to-morrow by the noon express."

I drove back not so fast as I had come, and marvelled at the quickness with which all had fallen into place. It seemed that this had been going on a long time, and that the worry and apprehension were of long standing, so

THE INHERITANCE

matter-of-course it appeared that I should be driving in a borrowed carriage to see a man dangerously ill, in the very hospital he had conducted an operation in, that morning! I felt empty, suddenly, and unreasonably tired, and drew up before the livery stable; at one side, on the ground floor, Henry's wife kept a sort of little coffee-and-sandwich stall, and two or three men, drivers of the funeral coaches, probably, were standing before the narrow counter with heavy stoneware cups before them. I threw the reins to a waiting boy and stepped in; Henry himself was one of the patrons. He made a place for me respectfully.

"What's the news from the hospital, doctor?" he asked eagerly (the Doctor had operated on Mrs. Henry, whose name, by the way, was O'Shaughnessy, and he never forgot how successfully. He had been one of the old lawless gang that followed Rob and Hux in the pre-academy days). "Still keeping his end up?"

"Yes, indeed," I said, "though out of his mind yet, I'm sorry to say." There was no use in avoiding this part of it—better get it over frankly. "You know a violent shock will do that, Henry. I don't know where we'd have been without you. Captain Banks would have been mighty glad to do a good turn to the Doctor, wouldn't he?"

"Yes, sir," Henry agreed thoughtfully, "he surely would, now you put it that way—even on his own funeral! Those shocks must be awful things. I suppose anybody in that neighbourhood would 'a' got one, hey?"

"I suppose so," I assented.

"Reason I asked," Henry went on, stirring his steaming cup vigorously, "we passed a tramp, 'bout a mile before we come up to you, on the Millpond road, reeling and staggering along, pretty well corned, we thought—

I BREAK THE NEWS TO CHRISSY

he was muttering and shouting, crazy like, holdin' his head—why, what's the matter, doc?"

In a flash my carelessness came over me.

"Go on! go on!" I gasped.

"Why, nothing, only we wondered, afterwards, if maybe he'd had one o' them shocks, too, and wasn't drunk, after all. What d' you think? He was a big, tough-looking fellow."

"I've been a stupid fool!" I groaned, "and it may be too late, worse luck! Can you start out two or three teams directly, Henry, along that road, and I'll send Mr. Robert Caldwell and the sheriff and any one else I can get. . . . That tramp has ten thousand dollars of the Doctor's money, Henry—all he had in the bank!"

"Lord a'mighty, doc, why didn't you tell us before? That's awful—why he's got a choice o' three stations, and—but there," he added with a real consideration, "I don't know what you could 'a' done more'n you did, when you come to think of it. It was neck or nothin' with the old Doctor, and no time for police work, was there?"

"That's it," I groaned again, "that was just it! I did the best I could, but—well, there's a chance yet. Don't go unarmed, Henry—he's an ugly customer. He threatened us on the drive."

I left the coffee untasted on the counter, threw down a dime beside it and dashed over to the bank. Within twenty minutes we had started half a dozen men out, and I was telephoning from the bank to the four nearest railroad stations. But I couldn't feel very hopeful: it was four o'clock . . .

A quick ring checked me as I was half-heartedly getting in touch with New York and a detective bureau.

"Is this you, doctor? All right—this is the hospital—Hunter. Miss Vereker told me to try the bank. See here,

THE INHERITANCE

doctor, there's been quite a change in Dr. Caldwell—I'm a little afraid it's the last flare-up. He seems pretty nearly rational—at least, he's asking who he is and all about it. I can't exactly say he knows any of us here, but he speaks plain enough to Miss Riggs. I was thinking some more of the family ought to be here; there's only Huxley, and I can't get hold of Robert, somehow. Mrs. Palse suggested Miss Chrissy's coming up, and I shouldn't wonder if it might be a good thing. He's quiet enough."

"All right," I said, "I'll bring her. We'll be there in fifteen minutes."

She was ready, of course—she felt I'd be there, she said, ever since they telephoned for me—and quite prepared, I could see, for the worst. We both were, of course. Sixty-one next birthday, you see. I had to tell her about the money, but I knew she'd never blame me. Still, when she said she'd never have forgiven me if I'd wasted five minutes on it a moment before I did, I felt better than I had since I ordered that coffee!

We got out in silence, and I went up in the little lift with her—she couldn't know who had been there last, or what we'd heard from him. Before the door we paused a moment.

"You must allow for the bandages, of course," Dr. Hunter reminded her gently, and she nodded. "You know, of course, that he's not responsible,"—she nodded again. We went in.

Nana was not there, a little to my surprise, and Hunter, a quick enough fellow in his way, stopped us a moment on the threshold.

"Mrs. Palse thought that as he didn't recognize her at all, there was no use her staying," he said; "she's gone to

I BREAK THE NEWS TO CHRISSY

lie down for a few minutes—of course, she feels it badly, and she was up all night in the maternity ward."

"Of course, of course," I murmured vaguely, but all the same I thought it was queer and so, I could see, did Chrissy. We would either of us have sworn that she wouldn't have left that bed.

"Who's that?"

It was the Doctor's voice, though rough and weak, and we stepped forward together unconsciously.

"How goes it, Doctor?" I said, as naturally as I could. "Don't—don't try to move!"

For as I neared him he actually rose on one elbow and thrust out his hands—the look of utter hate and murder in his eyes was plain to them all, and the guttural snarl that went with it turned my heart sick.

"Le' me at him! Le' me—" I slipped like a flash behind a draught-screen, and left Chrissy alone there, and with a bewildered, baffled stare he sank back: it was clear he distrusted his own sight.

"Th' whole damn business—all wrong—all crazy—doctored rum—" he muttered thickly, and they all looked distressed, and Hunter motioned Chrissy to go. But she set her lips and walked to the bed, though I saw she was white as she passed me; that snarl had been dreadful to hear.

"You know Chris, dear, don't you?" she asked him in her clear, firm voice, and we all held our breaths.

Hunter told me afterward that the colour flooded into her cheeks as soon as she spoke, and that she was as red as her bodice. He never saw her handsomer, he said.

There was a silence, and I knew as well as if I had been on the other side of the screen that he was staring at her. Finally he spoke:

"Chris? Chris?" he mumbled, "Chris who?"

THE INHERITANCE

Another silence.

"Spit it out, can't yer?" he said quite clearly, "Chris who?"

I heard her breath catch, and wondered that, knowing what she had to expect, she should be so overwhelmed. For there was no violence in these last words.

"Chr-Christopher, you know . . . Christopher, Doctor!" she got out, at last.

Still another silence, and there came from the bed a low, horrible chuckle—the cunning, calm chuckle you get in *delirium tremens*.

"Christopher! Christopher's a man's name! *God!* *We're all crazy together, then!*"

("Better come now, Miss Vereker," I heard Hunter.)

"'Christopher'! Ah—take that, *Christopher*, and let's see if you're real or like the other damned spook!"

They held him down, of course, and we got her out. I thought she would faint on the landing, but she bit her forefinger, deliberately, and the pain saved her.

"No, no—it isn't that—not what you think!" she cried wildly. "I expected that . . . but—but, oh, Hugh, his eyes—the way he looked at me—oh, it was too dreadful to tell!"

I was glad I couldn't be certain what she meant.

CHAPTER XXI

In Which We Manage, Somehow

IT IS, of course, an obvious truism that one looks back on periods of stress, and strain and finds them in the retrospect more unnerving and appalling than they appeared at the time. And yet I can't resist risking the truism, and marvelling a little at how we "kept up," as the Warwickians put it, so well, through what was surely an unusual measure of trouble for two young people—for, of course, it all fell on Chrissy and me. And as I indulge myself in this looking back, it occurs to me that the crises in my life have always massed themselves in this way: brief, sharp batterings of Fate, cruelly repeated at cruelly short intervals, and then long spaces of plain sailing and placid immunity.

And though, during the next three years, we received much sympathy from our friends, and were generally looked upon as singled out by Providence for the endurance of "more than our share" of its mysterious discipline, I have never been able to convince myself that our lot was, after all, so abnormally bitter. It may be that my profession, which has, of course, put me in a position to see more than most people of the undercurrents of life, prejudices me; but I am more and more convinced, as I grow older, that except in rare cases, it is only the extremely selfish or the unnaturally isolated personality that escapes in the years from twenty-five to fifty much more shock and loss than we did. It has so happened that our

THE INHERITANCE

sorrows have been, perhaps, rather unusually dramatic and therefore more difficult of concealment than those of our neighbours: I admit this cheerfully—the fact accounts, probably, for my itch for chronicling them, at this late date. But that we underwent more, bulk for bulk, than falls to eight out of ten of those marvellous, fate-connected, incredible little island groups in the sea of humanity that we call “families,” I am strongly inclined to deny.

Hamlet and *Lear*, my dear, young, romantic patients (whom your mammas beg me to cure of all sorts of obscure and modern complaints, and whom I diagnose as only victims to that old, old malady of youth!) *Hamlet* and *Lear* have found their way down to us, like *Ecclesiastes* and *Antigone*, because they are, essentially, realistic—as realistic, at bottom, believe me, as the characters of Mr. Howells, who have somewhat unfairly, it seems to me, confused that useful expression, in the minds of his countrymen, at least, to an equivalent for the daily journey from tub to table, and from table to bed. This is a very real journey, undoubtedly, but battle and murder and sudden death are real, too, and if we like *Hamlet*, it is not because he is like the hippogriff, who is a fairy tale, but because he resembles, in truth, our Uncle John Smith, who is difficult to live with!

And the chief objection to the style of romance which is supposed (and with some truth, I believe) to unfit our young damsels of the leisure class for the disillusionments of actual life, is not that they are too dramatic and highly spiced, but that the spice is all of one flavour and the drama is all in one scene.

We, on our own crowded little stage, were far too busy and troubled at the time I write of to realise the sudden dramatic quality of it all. In an amazingly short time

WE MANAGE, SOMEHOW

our life had adjusted itself to the new routine: three calls a day at the hospital; unusual care of Cary, whose devotion to his father had always been greater than any of the brothers', so that his weak heart gave way alarmingly under the shock and put him definitely to bed; greatly augmented responsibility for me, on whom most of the Doctor's practice that I had not fallen heir to before, pressed heavily. It was good for me: it braced me out of the remorse into which my carelessness (real or fancied) as to the ten thousand dollars had thrown me, and gave me a chance to make up for it by undertaking practically the support of the family till events should prove the Doctor's accident fatal or otherwise.

For the present he lay in a curious state of *coma*: there was no return of the fits of foul-mouthed rage that had so curiously obsessed him. The one that Chrissy had so unfortunately witnessed had died away, through mumbling and snarling, into sullen, obstinate silence, passing thence into a dazed, apparently frightened stage, and lastly into positive blankness, ending in a prolonged, sound sleep of nearly fifty-six hours. I saw him after twenty-four hours of this (with all precautions for a speedy disappearance), and again at twelve-hour intervals, until he woke, when it was judged best for him not to see any one so likely to cause a recurrence of the distressing rages. But I doubt, now, if this would have been the result: after that long, mysterious period of oblivion, Dr. Caldwell woke, extraordinarily restored as to pulse, temperature and every bodily function—so restored as to completely upset our theories as to the physical damage he had sustained, but so utterly blank mentally as to recall no image but that of the new-born. Speech meant nothing to him, the doctors were forced to believe, and after three days of careful nourishment we were introduced by

THE INHERITANCE

anxious degrees to his room, now the centre of interest in the hospital: first, Nana, unaccountably shrinking and perturbed; then Hux, next Cary, whom we had carried in the ambulance; then myself (I was sure, somehow, that the result would be what it was); last of all, Chrissy, white, and trembling slightly, but composed and determined. It was all useless; he stared at us vaguely, without a shadow of regard of any sort. Except that he had less than his usual ruddy colour and that the bandage about his head gave him an unfamiliar expression, he might have been the Doctor of a week ago, fortunately recovered after a nasty blow on the skull—but we all realised at a glance that the head of our household for so many genial, busy years, was, for the present, at least, quite gone.

And yet, strangely enough, after the horrid shock of his first state, this discovery did not affect us as it might have: the relief was greater than the pain. "Poor thing! All's one to him, now!" Nana said with a sob, and sat by him at every spare moment. Chrissy never missed her hour in the afternoon, and Aunt Addie used to walk over every other morning—the exercise was undoubtedly one of the causes of her unusually good health at that period. It was wonderful how Addie came up in a crisis; she was invaluable with Cary, who grew not unnaturally querulous at his enforced quiet, and she relinquished unconsciously all the little demands on us that made her a responsibility instead of a help.

After another fortnight we moved the Doctor out into a large, sunny convalescent room, and promoted him to a reclining chair by day, and as he lay there, all bandages removed, shaved and fresh, in a new, blue blanket-gown and homelike morocco slippers, a vase of carnations on the stand near him and a crackling open fire on the cheer-

WE MANAGE, SOMEHOW

ful hearth, photographs and his favourite paintings softening the distempered walls, books and little odds and ends from the office on the table, and Chrissy with her mending basket within reach of his hand, it was difficult to believe that he wouldn't speak at any moment, that the whimsical smile wouldn't light in his eyes. But his lips hardly moved from hour to hour, and his eyes, once fixed on any object, remained there indefinitely, unless startled away by some sudden movement or sharp sound. We could discover absolutely no preference for one attendant over another.

Nothing had ever been heard of the tramp, though Rob had taken that part of the matter into his hands and employed detectives liberally—in vain, for the fellow could not even be traced beyond Warwick.

It was on one of his consulting visits of this nature that the slight, veiled antagonism between Rob and me dropped all concealment and stood open to us both; though I am thankful to say there was no public rupture.

“This is a bad business about the old gentleman,” he began one afternoon, when I was enjoying a little well-earned Sunday leisure in the office—my office, now, for it had altered itself insensibly, to fit my special personal angles, and the desk had drawn up into the window, the new system of card catalogues stood in a neat cabinet near the door, the little table where Chrissy wrote out the bills had a pot of pink geraniums and a gay little paper-weight, and my own growing library of nervous disorders and children’s special treatment (this last a rising novelty) was replacing the old *Encyclopædia Britannica* and medical reports of the seventies. Most notable change of all, a serious, brindled German hound of the sort called Great Dane—they are really *Deutsche dogge*—

THE INHERITANCE

lay in massive slumber before the comfortable little English coal-grate Bert and Chrissy had cleaned out so triumphantly—it seemed so long ago! The Doctor never cared for dogs, and I had always kept the mongrels of my youthful collection at Nana's or the Verekers.

"It might have been a worse business," I returned briefly, pipe in teeth, as I puttered about among some corner shelves destined to be fitted with some small electrical apparatus.

"Yes, yes," he muttered vaguely, "but look here, Hugh, it's well into February, now, and there's no change—you admit that, don't you?"

"Absolutely none, as far as I can see," I agreed briskly.

"Exactly. I've spoken with J——y and B——n and that German fellow they had over, and young Hunter, and all of them. They don't hold out the slightest hope."

"Except that he's alive," I suggested.

"Oh, yes, of course—if you call it life."

"I certainly do call it life."

He shrugged his shoulders and lit one cigarette from another.

"Look here, Hugh," he began again, "don't think I don't appreciate what you're doing—I do."

"Suppose we leave that out of it, Rob," I said quietly.

"No, but I can't. Hux never opens his mouth, of course, except about his family, and Cary is as innocent as a babe, and Aunt Addie and Chrissy seem to think it a matter of course that you should devote your strength and best years simply to keeping my father's practice—for that's all it amounts to, isn't it?"

"Yes, that's all, since you put it that way."

"Well, I do put it that way. Now, the question is, how long is it going to last? You wouldn't necessarily select South Warwick as a place to practise, would you?"

WE MANAGE, SOMEHOW

"Not necessarily, perhaps."

"I should say not. And you certainly wouldn't have a big house like this, an invalid like Cary and an old lady on your hands. My father's old patients only took you with the feeling that he was there to refer to——"

"At least, they would have nobody who would know more about them, if I left!"

"Well and good—grant that. But the hospital practise, which you admit interests you more, has slipped over to Hunter, I hear. . . ."

"You've been going into this, haven't you, Rob?"

"And what if I have? With all this property tied up, and all these real estate investments, and the good will of the present practise—the *present* practise, mind you—you must see, Hugh, if you will look at it without prejudice, that it's simply idiotic to go on this way, pinching and economising, and acting as if there were any hope."

"I don't admit that there isn't."

"Well, you'll have to, sooner or later, that's all. You've scared the rest out of making any definite statement and, of course, as long as you hold out . . ."

"Look here, Rob," I broke in, bluntly, "I see what you're driving at, and of course it's easy enough to get Hux on your side, with his wife in her present condition, and a chance at the vice-presidency for himself. If you wish to sacrifice Chrissy, Aunt Addie, Cary and your father to your own city investments, and *have the legal right to do it*—go ahead. I can't stop you, and I, as you say, don't necessarily prefer South Warwick as a future career. But if you depend on my medical opinion as authority for breaking up, selling the property and the practise and dividing your shares (and you won't have to wait long for Cary's, by the way), you'll never get it—at least, not for a long time."

THE INHERITANCE

He jumped up, began to speak, but controlled himself and went out of the room abruptly—to a conference with Huxley, I afterward learned. There is no doubt I put them in a hard position, a position too ungracious to assume, even for Rob. And if I afterwards traced to Mrs. Hux more than one clinging, poisoned little cobweb of female gossip, more than one little hint of a jealous adopted son who fed his love of authority (and a good country practise) on the lost opportunities of others and feathered his own nest with his brothers' clipped wings—ah, well, I tried to be gentle with the selfish, purring little kitten—she was only fighting for her own, as Nature taught her!

It was a great responsibility I took in that ten minutes, in the office, and God knows it wasn't for myself I acted, however it turned out! I knew the load I set my shoulders to, and Chrissy knew (Rob to the contrary), for I explained it to her. We knew just how crippling the Doctor's enormous charity practise would be and how his careless, unmethodical system of bill neglecting had tied our hands! We knew—none better—what the loss of ten thousand dollars in cash meant to such a family as ours. And we knew just how much help we might expect from Rob and Hux, I promise you! But there didn't seem to be anything else to do. I knew, as no one else knew, what his Warwick practise meant to him, and I couldn't, while he lived and breathed, put an end to it, as his. Aunt Addie and Cary had grown like trees with the house: it stood, that old, red building, for the twined and rooted soul of all that our Anglo-Saxon race is founded on—the Family. And it was left for Chrissy and me, the two twigs of all that the old tree had sheltered so kindly, who *had* no family, to preserve it!

Strange fate that I, who had cursed the selfish institu-

WE MANAGE, SOMEHOW

tion that combined to crush me in my native land; that Chrissy, who had been, to all intents and purposes, abandoned by it from infancy—that we, of all others in our little world, should have fought, shoulder to shoulder, to defend it!

For it was a fight. When Rob curtly announced his engagement to us, and we had recovered from the shock of his bride-to-be, a plain, distinctly unpleasant sister of the most unpopular boy of our day at Crane's, he never knew of our shifts to present the lady with a wedding gift worthy of the daughter of a great oil king. Why she should have selected Rob out of the (doubtless) many aspirants for her hand, we never knew. Her father thought highly of him, beyond a doubt, and it was murmured in that part of the press about to be known as the "Yellow Journals," that old Larry Larson had strongly recommended his eldest daughter to make an end of romance and settle in life. She was not, as the papers put it, ten years older than her ambitious and far-seeing young husband, but she had certainly five years the advantage of him. All the same, it didn't take Chrissy to discover that she was really fond of him. I saw it in her eyes at the great, dull, glittering wedding breakfast, where all her lace couldn't make her young and pretty, but where all her diamonds couldn't hide that little gleam in her flat, pale eyes as she looked at her dignified, keen young lawyer.

A curious mixture of the great world was there: "old families" of New York, inscrutable, but consenting; brilliant Western meteors, amused at the easy capitulation of the social fortresses they had believed impregnable; actresses newly raised to the purple; threadbare aristocracy desperately refusing to fall from it; lofty British shareholders, staring, eating and drinking, and shedding the

THE INHERITANCE

lustre of the new Anglo-mania upon what was universally conceded to be a brilliant social function.

I think, take it all in all, we did Rob credit. Aunt Addie had, of course, to stay with Cary, who spent most of his time in bed, now, and Hux's fourth daughter was too recent an acquisition to allow of her mother's leaving home; but Hux and I escorted Chrissy, whose dress, constructed out of an embroidered crêpe shawl from her mother's trousseau, actually got reported in the papers and received such stares of envy that even Hux and I could but notice them! She wore her mother's carbuncles, and the creamy embroidery, set off by the rich, glowing stones, made a highly favourable frame for her dark eyes and heavy hair. She gave Rob a little ivory statuette, whose value, as set by Tiffany, leaked out, and was whispered around the big roomful of presents, where somebody was always telling somebody else that "it was really a museum piece—given to the young lady's father by the Egyptian government." Cary had inherited from his namesake aunt a beautiful little Chippendale secretary, of Virginia mahogany vintage, and at Chrissy's earnest solicitation—he had meant it for her—presented it proudly, delighted with the enthusiastic note from the heiress, who was, like all the elect of those days, newly awake to the charm of "old pieces." I devoted the proceeds of a successful article on infantile mal-nutrition to a bit of rock-crystal, and we all agreed in the refurbishing of the old English silver tea service, as the eldest son's due. With the initials of Rob and his bride stamped under the monogram of thirty-six years ago, it had a solid, satisfactory, family air, that handsome old service, and though it left our sideboard lamentably bare, we none of us grudged it, and we knew the Doctor wouldn't have.

Chrissy and I, fresh from contriving how best to cut

WE MANAGE, SOMEHOW

down the house-bills, wise in the food values of neck-of-mutton, mush-and-molasses, and pork-and-beans, couldn't but laugh to each other as we dallied with mounded mayonnaise, galantines, out-of-season fruit and champagne!

"I wish we could take some for Cary!" she confided to me under cover of the famous orchestra of Mr. L——r, which discoursed Strauss waltzes behind a great smilax screen.

Alas, even as we ate and drank and thought of him, poor Cary had ceased to need us or our fruit and wine. The telegram had been overlooked in the wedding bustle, and when Nana met us at the door that evening—we had celebrated by going to a concert in the afternoon—she had done the last services for the little fellow whose first severe illness she had nursed and soothed! It had been very quick and merciful, and we had only to bless the kindness that had sent her over to "sit with Miss Caldwell, the while you were away, Master Hugh"—for in moments such as these, Nana's tongue slipped its leash and forgot the "Yes, doctor" she was so proud to say.

It was just as his father had always prophesied: the slight throat affection he had always foreseen and warned me against had lately set in, and the exertion of sitting up to welcome young Fletcher, come for his Saturday wood-carving class, had proved too much.

It was the same with us as with most families, I imagine: once death pays his visit, the edge is off and the details of his second coming seem curiously habitual and wonted. Chrissy was very quiet and collected—it seemed to prove to me that she must have known, though we never discussed that phase of it—and if she put on her simple black again as a matter of course, I could not feel

THE INHERITANCE

that her calm, busy self-possession was the mask of a terrible suffering.

In the evenings, as she mended or made, she would wipe her eyes silently, now and then, and once I saw her sitting in his room with her chin in her hands, but she spoke of him often and easily, it seemed to me, in marked distinction to her manner as regarded Bert. Indeed, none of us could speak of Bert readily for two or three years; it was too bitter, too poignant—the might-have-been was too much to bear. But Cary's gentle, not-unhappy life slipped away under the shadow of his father's strange fate, and left us, so braced for what might be a long struggle, so used to expect his going, that it seemed more a fulfilment than a parting. I have seen many such, and marvelled afresh at the softening, binding power of Death, who is not always the grisly enemy that inexperience dreads.

It was Easter, now, and as there had been absolutely no change in the Doctor's condition, I decided to move him to his own house, to the great delight of Chrissy and Aunt Addie, and the first warm day after the decision found him in Cary's old, sunny parlour, with Miss Riggs, his constant attendant hitherto, established in the adjoining bedroom. It was an expense, of course, and Chrissy objected strongly, wishing all the care of him, but I realised how impossible this would be, with all her other cares, and I understood, too, better than she could, the strain of continued tendance upon one so mysteriously afflicted. Miss Riggs worshipped him, was proud to care for him, believed desperately with me that the strange veil might lift, and assured us that he had warned her a year ago that she was not strong enough for general nursing. She had an indisputable right to rate her services at the moderate value she set us, and in the end we

WE MANAGE, SOMEHOW

accepted her gratefully. So into the vacancy that Cary left, his father slipped, so gently that no one seemed missing, somehow, and when we fell into the habit of keeping my room always ready for John Fletcher, who grew able to devote more and more evenings to his now famous club, and spent all his Sundays with us, the old house was seen to have mended all its breaches and no vacant chambers cried out at us as we passed by their halls.

Our patients filled all the empty hours and hands; Bert's old studio was in constant, quiet use, for the lads came and went by side porch and back stairs and never once disturbed us; and we had this year what had been lacking for many—children's feet and voices, the first since ours to echo there.

Mrs. Hux, as I think I must have mentioned before, didn't get on with Aunt Addie, and had been used to say, very frankly, that she never quite understood Miss Vereker's position at the Caldwells. But the fourth Miss Caldwell was delicate and took up a great deal of time, the third and second Misses Caldwell were too young for school, and the eldest Miss Caldwell, a strapping, dictatorial young person, needed more room for her expansive personality than her parents' premises, in a fashionable location, it is true, but somewhat limited in area, could be expected to supply. So there were few days that we didn't see them, by two in the afternoon, a whisking young tomboy, two shy little love birds and a pale, doll-like image in a varnished English "pram" with a worried nursemaid in the rear. Khitmutgar, the staid old pony, companion of an earlier tomboyhood, is led forth, docile and affectionate as ever, and Aunt Chrissy summoned to conduct him about the orchard paths, under the old white pines and round the flagged grape arbour. He

THE INHERITANCE

always stops at the covered well house, wreathed with wistaria, where he had been used to nose out Hux's stores of apples and seed cookies, and Aunt Chrissy tells the endlessly fascinating history of how papa was surprised the day he came to look for his nut cake there! The tomboy stays with Aunty, the love birds go hand-in-hand to see if Uncle Hugh has time to tell them a story, and the baby is wheeled around to Aunt Addie, in her sunny porch corner.

For Aunt Addie, never too fond of children in our time, has mellowed wonderfully to them in this generation, and discusses infant feeding learnedly with Nana and the nurse, and holds the baby by the hour together. Old stores of shells, long since gathered on Warwick Beach, does Aunt Addie bring out; quaint, worn spinning tops and dog's-eared fairy tales and bows and arrows does she miraculously resurrect in Aunt Chrissy's very teeth, who had thought them spring-cleaned out of existence long ago! Catechisms does Aunt Addie hear and scrap books for the children's ward does she paste and taffy does she order to be boiled, whereat Uncle Hugh and Aunt Chrissy smile slyly at each other.

And whoever may neglect Aunt Addie, there is one who never means to, it seems, for John Fletcher, a broad, manly fellow, with the beard that we all wore then, a straight eye and a strong grip, known well to many a lad in Warwick who has no friend but him,—John Fletcher is never far from her chair or sofa (not that Aunt Addie inclines greatly to sofas), consults her seriously as to his growing affairs, and tells her all his plans "the very first," an attention she dearly loves.

He had always had a quick, commercial cleverness, and from the first I had believed there was a great chance for his now famous *Fletcher's Emulsion*, the result of a

WE MANAGE, SOMEHOW

chance discovery of happy flavouring and convenient blend. I helped him in patenting the harmless formula and rejoiced with him in the ready sale it found, though I was quite unprepared for the leaps and bounds it made under the judicious advertising which grew into a practical profession in the 90's.

That spring his firm helped him to incorporate and broke ground for a factory, and hardly had we ceased marvelling at the old house he rented in the Warwick slum district, papered, painted, fire-escaped and fitted with shower baths and billiard tables for the Bert Caldwell Club, when Aunt Addie told us that he had celebrated his first salary as vice-president of the Fletcher's Emulsion Company by an Albert Caldwell Scholarship at Yale to be filled by Warwick boys from the club.

"If only Robert could know!" she sobbed, and we comforted her through our own straining tears.

Day in, day out, the Doctor lay in his sunny room, no longer lifted to the chair, even, for the effort seemed to me to prove indefinitely uncomfortable to him, and Miss Riggs, on whose judgment we relied greatly, agreed with me. Day in, day out, his mild, empty eyes fixed themselves vaguely on space, following quick movements only. Sudden noises distressed him, we thought, and the summer thunder storms affected the whole organism painfully, so that he required steady stimulants while they lasted; indeed, both Miss Riggs and I thought that the broken sounds he once muttered—hardly more than groans, we had to admit—during a bad August storm, were the sounds of approaching death, and had almost sent for Hux.

After that storm I fancied his reactions a thought more complex, it seemed to me his eyes shifted a shade more frequently, and once, that autumn, he groaned in the

THE INHERITANCE

night. But it all (if it had ever existed outside of our imagination) passed again, and we watched like misers, around an empty casket.

Hux had long since forgiven us, and admitted to me privately that we had taken the only dignified course, and that it was a comfort to see the old name on the old shingle and feel that Aunt Addie wasn't cast adrift in some boarding house. And when Rob, to our surprise, brought Mrs. Rob to our Thanksgiving dinner, and we sat about the elongated table, I at the head, by general request, Aunt Addie at the foot, Chrissy and the infants along one side and Fletcher with his first proud freshman between Mrs. Rob and her husband, I telegraphed a thrill of pride to Chrissy that no one at that table knew what planning the great turkey, the oysters and chicken pie, the nuts and raisins and mincemeat had cost us. Fletcher, who had begged to send in wine, nuts, fruit and bonbons, cigars and Hux's favourite anisette, little knew what a relief he had been to us, for not the least of our triumphs was that the honest fellow never suspected the straits we had been in, nor dreamed that Thomas hadn't been paid for six months, that Chrissy had fallen back on Aunt Addie's stores of black dresses, that I was wearing the Doctor's shoes and that the hogshead of oil old Larry Larson sent us for a joke had enabled us to keep the grocer's bill to reasonable proportions all winter!

The Caldwell house had always stood for ease and luxury to him, and as he never came to us without a great hamper of delicacies, he never saw the difference. Faithful Anne Riggs worked as chambermaid, seamstress and charwoman, and Nana, who would have guessed in a moment if she had been able to see us often, thought the help she no longer offered quite unnecessary. On this Thanksgiving day she sat with the Doctor (we never left

WE MANAGE, SOMEHOW

him a moment alone) to allow Miss Riggs her treat, and the nurse, her keen, regular features softened by the frills of one of Chrissy's old, light dresses, sat between Rob and John Fletcher.

Rob's hair was gray at the temples, now, and his mouth drooped. He had fallen an early prey to nervous dyspepsia, and looked longingly at the turkey; his wife rarely spoke. Fletcher had hinted to me—for Fletcher conversed now with financial magnates far beyond my acquaintance—that old Larson had been badly squeezed by the big oil interests and needed all Rob's cleverness to get him through honourably—even by New York standards. And I knew that Rob had tried to borrow from Hux's bank; he was badly in debt and their position required large sums of ready money.

So it was a curious fact that of all who sat around that turkey, beyond a doubt, the happiest people there were two orphans, one of whom had lost her lover not a year since and had to work far into every night to help the other, on whose shoulders hung her support and the support of a rheumatic old woman and a man whose state was popularly supposed to be worse than death!

And yet so strange, so rich in surprises is this old world, that these two who had grown old before their time with work and responsibility, laughed in their patched shoes, owned life a battle and the dice loaded, but hoped to win, drew strength from every night for every day, and, harnessed to a tomboy and two love birds, romped around the table where they gave their honest thanks!

CHAPTER XXII

In Which Things Take a Turn

WELL, well, it's all over now, that hard time, and I wonder, sometimes, why I can't make it seem harder, as I live it over in memory! And yet for the life of me, I can't, as I recall the pale, worried fellow who sat for so many hours alone at night in his office, rubbing his eyes to make the figures come straight, wondering if he had done right, after all, to take such heavy responsibilities, fretting a little at his classmates' brilliant, unhampered successes (for my interests always lay in problem and research rather than practise), I can't, I say, feel half as much pity for his straits as pleasure in the little whiffs that came to him from time to time, the little relaxations, the little unexpected windfalls that mean so much to the unexpecting worker!

Those delightful days when, during the next spring, the old bills began for some reason to produce their long-waited cheques! The joy of the dividends from Fletcher's Emulsion, in which we had all, Aunt Addie included, been practically forced to take a few friendly shares! I really don't remember a jollier day, in its unpretending way, than that April morning when Chrissy and I started for New York with two hundred dollars that we "simply had to spend for clothes." With new hat, shoes and gloves and a trim tan overcoat, secure in the future fit of the black frock coat young doctors thought necessary then, I sallied forth with Chrissy, demure in a delicious

THINGS TAKE A TURN

gray ulster and the most refreshing garnet-breasted *toque* (all the ladies spoke of *toques*, then, I think, and they took to bonnets earlier in life) and together we selected a garnet silk and a pleasant-coloured soft wool material like the top of a lightly browned biscuit. These colours were impressed on my mind because the clerk in each case remarked with a smile: "This will be extremely becoming to your wife's complexion, doctor," as I gave the address.

It seems rather a sad tribute, now, to our staid, practical, householding temperaments and the brotherly-sisterly feelings of two young people who ought to have blushed and started nervously, that we didn't the least bit do either!

"It's funny how they all seem to think we're married," Chrissy remarked absently; "I think I'll get another pair of gray gloves, Hugh, they are such a bargain, and do you think we can manage that lace collar for Aunt Addie, your coat was so reasonable?"

"I don't see why not," I said, "and I've been thinking, Chris, that since the Doctor's underclothes fit me so well, and if Rob really *does* give up his extra horse and sends on the harness and lap robes, I'll tell the tailor to make an extra pair of light trousers while he's about it, and maybe I'll go to that conference at Baltimore!"

Small wonder that a third interested attendant, whom I had insisted that Chrissy should patronise to the extent of a broad-brimmed summer hat with a Roman scarf about it, like Mrs. Hux's new one, should suggest, after hearing one of our conferences over office towels (which have such a terrible way of wearing out!):

"Any children's things for spring, madam? We have some sweet Easter hats in the children's department!"

I swear the girl didn't even colour!

THE INHERITANCE

"I'm only an aunt, thank you," she said, with her pleasant, warm smile.

A vague sense of wrong crept over me.

"But you oughtn't to be, Chris," I began, as we moved away, "you ought to have babies of your own, do you know it? And here you are, slaving away for us all like an old, settled . . ."

"Why, I *am* settled, you goose!" she laughed, "and have been for years! I was born 'Aunt Chrissy,' I think, Hugh, I enjoy it so much! You know perfectly well I shan't marry—don't you know, some girls don't? And what would you do, Dr. Caldwell, if I did?"

What, indeed! And it was quite true that she was "settled": she looked more than her twenty-six years, a little—though not, as I began to notice, then, so much in advance of her real age as she had at sixteen or at twenty. Like many women of the mature, dark type, Chrissy was wearing extremely well, and it occurred to me that she was distinctly of Pippy Crane's order, who, at thirty-six, had not altered for five years, while the lovely Dossy was faded and nervous, and Lulu, I had heard, already "touched up" her hair!

It was Easter Saturday, and I was looking forward to a rather sad Sunday with Aunt Addie, for it would be poor Cary's anniversary and she never forgot those dates. But that Sunday was destined to prove another sort of day altogether.

At three in the morning Nana called me by telephone to what proved when I got there to have been the death-bed of old Beulah, the Bermuda negress who had cooked and cared for Professor Vereker so many years. After his death she had roamed and drifted uneasily, between Warwick and New York, parted from Diana, who had long since left them, possessed to the end by her strange

THINGS TAKE A TURN

dislike of Chrissy, whose entrance into the world she had so long resented. Her culinary talents supported her easily and we had always, among us, kept an eye on her, as the phrase goes, and Nana herself had been instrumental in getting her at the last into the public ward of the hospital.

"She 'minds me o' the old times, doctor, and I can't feel it's altogether best to forget," said the loyal soul.

Still, I couldn't quite see why I should be summoned at three o'clock that Easter morning to hear that the old woman's troubles were over, and I'm afraid I spoke rather curtly.

"Any special reason, Mrs. Palse . . . ?"

"Yes, Master Hugh," she said gravely, "there is, and I couldn't feel right not to call you immediate. That tramp, the one that stole all that money from the poor Doctor——"

"Yes, yes! Go on, what?" I cried, for Nana always wiped her eyes when she mentioned the Doctor.

"Of course the poor creature was wandering like, and she always spoke outlandish, as we all know, but I could always make out what she wanted, you know, and I'm sure she meant that it was him that came to the Professor's house while she was there, and left the money."

"While she was there? Why, Nana, the house has been closed for years! She was rambling!"

"Didn't you know she always stopped there, sir? In through the wood shed she'd get and 'twas winked at by the agent, for she often made her a fire in the kitchen, winters. Miss Chrissy always knew it. She took her some soup there, once, and the queer old thing threw it out. She said she was there the day o' the big storm, and a big, blackish man came in, and she was afraid, but when she saw it was the Doctor, she let him stay."

THE INHERITANCE

"The Doctor! Why, she *was* crazy, then! But the money, Nana, the money!"

"Yes, sir, I'm coming to it. She said the big man had pains in his head, but he knew her name, and called her Beulah, and then he had a fit and fell on the floor, she said, but before that he took out a great roll of money, all yellow, and hid it under the shavings in the wood pile and put a penny on top——"

"A penny?"

"Yes, sir, but that's her crazy negro way of lying, I don't doubt——"

"Well, well, is it there? Did she leave it?"

"So she said. And that she was afraid to tell, for fear of the police, for they might say she killed him."

"Did he die there?"

"It seems so, doctor. I couldn't rightly make out that part, for she kept saying that sometimes he was the Doctor and then he would be the Devil, again. But he had a fever and another fit and then he died. And she said she'd never been there since, for fear of hauntings and such like. You see, she was never herself, since the Professor died, doctor."

"I'll call Mr. Hux directly," I said excitedly, for, like Nana, I felt I couldn't wait. It seemed too good to be true—and yet . . . !

Before long he had joined me and before much longer we were pushing into the dark, cobwebbed shed, the lantern from the Stanhope faint against the pale dawn. Hux was inclined to pooh-pooh the whole thing, but there was just enough of the barely possible about it to give us a great start and a thrill when we saw an ugly, broken shoe below a length of soiled trouser, projecting from the brown, broken bits of the great pile of kindling wood.

THINGS TAKE A TURN

"Hugh, old fellow, she was right!" he muttered, and grasped my arm nervously.

I did not, naturally, share his repugnance to the inspection of the unpleasant matter before us—at least, not to the degree he manifested—and I had soon made all the proof possible to make that the murderous fellow of a year and a half ago—or what there was left of him—lay indeed in the old Vereker wood-house. I can shut my eyes now and see the queer shadows from my lantern play upon the dusty, stained walls, the old barrels, the rotten garden hose, the toothless, wooden rake, the watering pot without a spout, that I reviewed hastily in my search for a pile of shavings. Suddenly, there they were—they leaped into the circle of light in a far corner, a mound as high as my waist, and as I pushed tentatively about in the base of it, cynical, suddenly, as to any result, my hand closed on a hard, resisting object, and I drew out, breathing quick, a roll of fresh, yellow banknotes, while a hard coin dropped through my fingers and tinkled on the trodden, earthen floor. I had no need to study it—it was—it must be—his old Roman coin!

"So that was the penny!" I muttered; "old Beulah was right! Why—why should he take it and leave the watch?"

"It's mighty good he did—don't you see it identifies it as ours?" Hux answered soberly; "the two go together—nobody else had a coin like father's."

But my head was whirling. Old thoughts, old doubts, *old fears* surged back over me, and the months since the accident were wiped out like writings on a child's slate. I stood staring at the coin, while things unspeakable raced through my brain. *Who* had laid that coin—proof of his identity—on that pile of yellow bills: *who?* Whose mind, planning, had selected money and medal—and

THE INHERITANCE

left the watch? Whose soul dictated to those hairy hands that had grasped Black Molly's bridle? *Whose?*

Oh, why had I not listened to Beulah with my own ears? Why had I not been able to ask——

“Hadn't we better get off?” Hux asked softly; “there's a lot to be done and Sunday's a hard day. . . .”

“Yes, yes,” I assented, “yes, I suppose so. Better telephone Rob. I'll send the coroner and the police up.”

It was Easter morning when we got home.

CHAPTER XXIII

In Which You May or May Not Believe

IHAVE rarely been so touched as I was on that windy, wet afternoon a fortnight later, when Hux, twisting the stem of his tiny *chasse* of apricot brandy in his fingers (after as good a dinner as he could have got at home, Chrissy and Aunt Addie congratulated each other) told me that Rob had attended to all the legal details, and that in view of the well-known hopeless condition of his father and the entire community of interest and opinion between the only heirs, he was in a position to offer me one-third of the ten thousand dollars, outright.

"And I think, Hugh," he added, a little nervously, it seemed to me, "that it would be only the decent thing for us all to put up five hundred apiece, say, as a share for Chrissy. She's the only sister we ever had, and if father could see what she's done all this while . . . you see, his not making a will would leave her . . ."

I saw, perfectly. I saw, too, that though Hux had in a way the whiphand of Rob at present, in the event of the Doctor's dying, there would be nothing for Chrissy, and Rob was hardly in a financial condition to recognise very delicate obligations.

"I say we make it a thousand each," I suggested, and he not only agreed but actually bullied Rob into doing the same. I had never before felt on such an equality of sonship with the boys, and it was very sweet to me, I can tell you.

THE INHERITANCE

I had the less objection to taking my share that I had more than earned it, of course, but there was another reason, one that I kept to myself all through the quiet summer and well into the autumn.

There was no change in the Doctor and no one believed that there would be. That we should watch and tend him until, sooner or later, the feeble spark should vanish out of the flesh that barely held it, breathing, was all that any one of the various eminent men that his name easily brought to me could promise. His enormous vitality alone, the perfect functioning of an unusually healthy body, had preserved that body so long, and a year, a month—nay, a day more of what we were forced to call life, since it was not death—what difference did it make?

Indeed, I am not sure that my own feelings, now, were not more scientific than personal. Rob and Hux, I knew, regarded their father as dead, and when I laid before them, on a wintry day nearly two years after the accident, the dangerous experiment I wanted their permission to make, I, for one, could hardly blame Rob if I caught in his voice that its danger was not entirely a drawback in his eyes.

It was Fletcher who really decided me. We had been discussing, after a July thunderstorm which had weakened our patient's pulse almost fatally (though Miss Riggs had been sure that his nostrils had twitched and his lips moved) the probable effects of a continuous electric current; and though I explained to him that this treatment had been employed at the very first, in the hospital, and more than once, later, but always with such terrifying results that it had been almost immediately checked, he remained obstinately unconvinced.

"Perhaps it wasn't strong enough," he said.

I stared at him.

YOU MAY OR MAY NOT BELIEVE

"My own idea, precisely," I said at last; "but . . . the risk, Fletcher, the risk!"

"Anything's better than this, Caldwell," he answered quietly, "and I want to tell you that Miss Riggs is breaking down. She's very nervous about him and she's lost weight this year. You'll never supply her place—if she has to leave."

I saw it was so, after a moment of anxious thought; and when he showed me a clipping from an electrical journal with a rather technical explanation of the anomalous effects of heavy voltage and a query as to the curious questions it opened in regard to the matter of electrocution, I found that these two tiny straws suddenly showed me the direction of my mind and explained my growing interest in larger batteries and more complicated apparatus than Warwick could offer.

Rob and Hux never knew what a share of my portion of the famous ten thousand went into those great glass cases, but Chrissy guessed, and nearly quarrelled with me because I would not let her bear a share in their purchase.

It was all very quietly arranged: Aunt Addie acquiesced with an unexpected calmness, and put her hand on his forehead very quietly as she took her turn at what might be a last look. His eyes were nearly always closed now, and this was generally regarded as a bad symptom. Rob and Hux stood together by the bed, looked a moment, then went out together, arms across each other's shoulders, in their old school-boy way. Chrissy bent a moment and kissed the delicately tinted cheek bone above the short gray beard. Then she took my hand in both hers.

"Whatever happens, Hugh, you've done your very, very best, from the beginning," she said, low, but quite clearly.

THE INHERITANCE

I wrung her hands, but couldn't speak. I had no hope, just then, for all my excitement was over, but it seemed that I must go on. Something had driven me forward ever since I had broached the matter timidly to Nana, and she, to my surprise, had warmly advised it.

"If there's but a chance, as you say, Master Hugh, 'tis but right for all that it should be tried," she said calmly; "I've been thinking these three months 'twould be better settled one way or another. Those New York doctors have kept you from freeing your mind this long time: that I know."

I had only Hunter and two others of the hospital staff with me, and one of my medical classmates who had agreed with me from the beginning. He was to give me such simple help as I should need, and Miss Riggs and Nana were ready with stimulants. The broad, straight, stairs had made it an easy matter to move him on a cot to the office, and once there all personality left him, so far as I was concerned (the common course with me), and he became the patient merely—I, the interested but unmoved practitioner. I fitted the padded bulb to his head, stated in a few brief sentences to my noncommittal colleagues what results might be hoped for, and nodded to Hunter, who cranked the wheel of the big static battery, as placidly as though he were about to soothe a lady's neuralgia.

I thought in a lightning flash of Chrissy's brave words: "If he dies—why, then, we must just think he died two years ago!" and with my finger at his pulse administered my first shock.

His eyelids flew apart, and the colour left his face. I motioned for the second.

The muscles about his mouth twitched and he groaned: I felt a thrill of delight, but realised imme-

YOU MAY OR MAY NOT BELIEVE

diately that I got no pulse. Miss Riggs was at him in a second, and when the stimulant was fairly down I sent my third shock crashing along those mysterious, sleeping nerves and even while my classmate murmured, "Easy, easy, Caldwell! Look out, there!" I drenched the inanimate body lying before me with more of that terrible, tremendous current than I had ever handled in my life before. The air reeked with released ozone and blue, jagged sparks flew from the wheel and the chains of the apparatus. The body on the long table quivered and twisted, the eyeballs rolled, the lips parted, and as I flung off the current, that deep, strangling, welling gasp that even the nurses call the "going soul" rattled through the tense room.

"Gone, hasn't he?" Hunter whispered, and I noticed how the hair still stood on end on his blond head under the electric influence.

Miss Riggs's hand was on his heart, but I knew by her face that there was no movement under that waiting hand. Her hair, too, waved curiously above the neat uniform.

I saw Nana with a tiny glass, but I shrugged my shoulders dully, as she tried to part the set teeth.

"It was madness—madness!" I thought, "and they all knew it!"

How the ozone reeked! Why would no one open a window? What was Nana saying?

"Shall I give any more, sir? There was nearly an ounce."

"For God's sake—*it's down!*" said a voice, and we rushed to the table—it seemed we were far away from it.

"Another ounce—if he'll take it," I said, and my voice seemed to come from a distance.

We waited, seventeen seconds by Hunter's watch, and

THE INHERITANCE

then his eyelids quivered, raised, and fixed themselves, and his eyes looked dully into mine.

"Molly!" he said hoarsely, but quite distinctly, "where's Molly? What is it, Hugh?"

I knew in an instant what he meant, and said, calmly, Miss Riggs told me later, and quite naturally:

"She's all right, Doctor—she ran away home. We had an accident. Will you drink a little more of this?"

He drank easily and Nana opened a window.

"My head hurts terribly, Hugh," he said feebly, "is that Hunter? Better send for a wagon—I can't walk. I must have been struck, I think. Take a look at my head, will you, boys?"

He was coming on too fast to deceive, so I spoke quickly:

"You're in the office, Doctor; we brought you here unconscious, you see. After a bit we'll take you up to—
to Chrissy's room," I added hastily, for there was no other room, now, that wouldn't lead to questions.

He nodded weakly and sank back, and while he rested, breathing slowly, they shook my hand and whispered congratulations—too soon, perhaps, I feared. Indeed it was because of this that I decided to let them all come down, for who should say that this was not the end? They had a right, it seemed to me, to see him once more, as he had been. So Hux and Rob, Aunt Addie and Chrissy, all composed and quiet to a degree, spoke a moment to the man who had been absent from them for two years and supposed that he had left them—or three of them, at least—that very day!

"Well, well, I gave you a scare, eh, Rob?" he whispered, "how quickly they got you! Don't alarm Cary—the boy's heart won't stand it."

I think we all gave way a little, then.

YOU MAY OR MAY NOT BELIEVE

Though we watched all night, there was only steady improvement to record, and after forty-eight hours more it seemed to me unwise to delay his complete enlightenment till his keen wits should force the situation from somebody's carelessness. Indeed, I had no special fear of the shock: his was never an emotional or excitable nature. I prophesied that interest, sheer, impersonal interest, would turn out to be his keenest sensation, and the event proved me right.

And though I touched but lightly on it, and though he had, of course, no slightest recollection of anything after the quick, horrified sight of that vicious, frightened tramp's face so close to his—that, and then the crashing blow—I could see that the story of the bills and the Roman coin and the dying mutterings of the old negress struck him most forcibly. He would cross-examine Nana by the hour, and he soon forced out of me my unwilling recollections of his hospital ravings.

But all this was when he had got downstairs again, which we had to allow in a fortnight, as he seemed quite able to venture it, and long after the town had learned with amazement that the impossible had happened once more, and that "the old Doctor" was back again.

It has no idea of its real claims to fame, has South Warwick. Tell any inhabitant of that burgh to-day that on one of its outlying country roads, not six miles from the new blue-stone Court House (a trolley goes by the spot now) there took place, a quarter century ago, one of the most crashing impossibilities science has ever had to incorporate into her reluctantly expanding system, an event so incredible that without the most absolute series of proofs the telling of it alone would class the teller among the hopeless gulls of a gullible generation,—and

THE INHERITANCE

that inhabitant will stare at you and ask what you can possibly mean. Was it that transfusion of blood old Doctor Caldwell accomplished so cleverly, back in eighty-something? That was written up in the newspapers. Or was it that discovery that had something to do with insanity and eye-strain—anyway, he took a woman out of the asylum and some German oculist came over to Warwick just to see her, and she wasn't insane after all. They kept her in a dark room, and after that she gave ten thousand dollars to the Warwick hospital, and somebody said it was all described in a German scientific journal, and the old Doctor got a medal from some society or other.

Yes, indeed, he was really famous: in a way. He was asked to go to New York more than once. But he never kept any account of his fees, you know—it was perfectly ridiculous. You simply couldn't get him to send in a bill, rich or poor. You would suppose he'd have a secretary or an assistant for that part of it, since he insisted he was no accountant and had better uses for his time, but as soon as he got one, he set him to working just as hard at the office patients, and nothing more got done. It was a pity his wife died—not that she was interesting at all or had much influence over the boys, but still, she might have attended to the bills—a great many doctors' wives do.

Really, until that English girl—what was her name, now?—oh, Vereker!—until she took charge, things got pretty careless in the house: there must have been a great deal of waste. Miss Caldwell would insist on so many servants—ridiculous, in this country. Two maids and the driver would have been plenty. And having the young doctor there, too, with all those boys of his own! But he was a generous old fellow, to be sure, and his

YOU MAY OR MAY NOT BELIEVE

own worst enemy as far as getting on in the world went. But that dreadful accident showed how many friends he'd made—they had to have a nurse at the telephone night and day, at first. A frightful thing. After all the insane people he'd treated (since that eye-strain business, you know; people came from all over) to be that way himself! Perfectly raving mad. Concussion of the brain, and lightning had something to do with it. One of those balls of fire that you hear about.

Thus the inhabitant, and even to hint at what (I believe) happened in South Warwick in '83, would cause him to look at you pityingly and leave you, convinced that you yourself were headed for the asylum, with no hope of eye-strain to release you from it.

Well, well, perhaps so! The proof of what he and I believe to have occurred on that country road is dead and buried now—if it ever had any proofs. And though I could point to many a religion that many a man has died for, which has been based on less proof than I feel we have for what I have only dared to hint in these collected memories, I will press it on you no further, but leave you to make what you can of it and to rejoice with us as Chrissy sits at his feet in the pleasant winter fire-light, and reads, with only now and then a happy break in her accustomed grave, full voice, from the immortal history of David Copperfield!

CHAPTER XXIV

In Which We Take Our Ease

HERE was scarcely a day in the first of the bright, cold, early winter that followed, that Chrissy and I hadn't to take counsel together privately in the office. This was for many reasons, but chiefly, of course, in the matter of the Doctor. Though his weakness and awkwardness in walking kept him, as yet, in his room, he had progressed so far in a few weeks as to dispense finally with Miss Riggs and to have already filled her room with the books we brought up to him. Now he was impatient to get down to the office again, and to see the old friends who came every day in some other than the purely friendly relation which was all I had yet allowed. And just here lay the difficulty.

"You see, Chris," I explained, somewhat diffidently, for I dreaded what I knew would follow, "you see, it's going to be awfully hard to break it to him—but I'm afraid some—quite a few . . . that is, lots of them are going to fight shy of the Doctor, and it puts me in a hard—"

"You mean, Hugh, they won't trust him? They don't believe—"

"That's just it. You see, every one knew, when he first went to the hospital, how he—"

"I know, I know," she interrupted hastily; "but he's exactly the same as he ever was, Hugh, they must see it!"

"People are very suspicious," I said slowly, "and it's

WE TAKE OUR EASE

all been so—so theatrical, somehow. Then, another thing, Chris: my succeeding so well with it all . . . ”

“Oh, I know, and I’m so glad! You deserve every bit of it, Hugh dear!”

By which cryptic interchange the astute reader will, of course, have divined that the last two years have made me what assuredly I never dreamed of that day, ten years ago, when I saw in a flash of intuition (and in this very room, too!) that my duty was to learn the Doctor’s trade. I only meant, honestly, to help and please him—and here I was, one of the leading physicians in a wealthy little suburb, preferred, as a matter of cold fact in many cases, to the man who had made me what I was!

Well, well, it’s life, all this, just life, and there’s no blinking it, even if the blinking looks prettier-behaved.

So we walked up and down in front of the grate, Chrissy and I, and puzzled mightily over it all. How to tell the Doctor that young Mrs. Bragg actually preferred me to assist her through the forthcoming interesting family event? Me, and not him, who had attended her into the world? Me, thirty-two and unmarried? That old Miss Peyton wanted me to apply the electricity to her spine? That Carol Lee thought that since I’d diagnosed his twins’ double-mastoid so well, I’d better attend to the operation?

“Mrs. Levi put Marguerite Bragg up to it,” said Chrissy crossly. “She thinks you’re a perfect wonder. I think it’s very silly of Marguerite. If *I* were going to have a baby, I know I’d rather have the doctor who had *me*!”

“I know,” I said humbly, “you *would* think so!”

“It’s positively ungrateful!” she went on, “just tell Marguerite so, why don’t you?”

“My dear girl, how can I?”

THE INHERITANCE

I always loved to see Chris ruffled and standing up for her own. She coloured and her eyes snapped and her brows drew together like the little girl's that used to play with the big hound, so long ago.

But it all cleared away, this particular little tempest in our family teapot, and in the neatest and most unexpected way; for Aunt Addie burst in upon us with a tale so disjointed and amazing that we rushed up to the Doctor's room, to find the hero and heroine of it sitting on each side of his sofa in a triple alliance of delight and amusement.

"Well, Hugh, what do you think of it?" he asked eagerly; "I know you don't want me to get to work, but am I good for a trip around the world—eh?"

"Why, Fletcher! The very thing. And not a bit too quick for *you*, either!" I cried delightedly.

For Fletcher had got perilously near the point of overstrain, and I had warned him more than once of late.

"Yes," he admitted, "I believe you're right, Hugh. I chartered the Larson yacht yesterday. And the Doctor here is just about persuaded to go with us—it's a year's trip, and we'll all come back made over and ready for work."

"But—but you don't need Miss Riggs," I said bluntly; "what nonsense, Fletcher! You're not at any such point as that!"

"Why, the Doctor dresses himself entirely, now—didn't you know it, Anne?" says Chrissy, ruffling.

"Hugh! Hugh! Are you as blind as a bat?" from Aunt Addie reproachfully. "I do believe, Chrissy, you are as bad as he is—you always *were* the dullest girl!"

We stare stupidly.

"But he *doesn't* need—" I begin again.

"There's where you're wrong, Caldwell—I need a **nurse**

WE TAKE OUR EASE

badly—*this* nurse," says Fletcher serenely, and Anne Riggs blushes bravely behind the Doctor's shoulder.

I gasp and Chrissy flies at her.

"Why, Anne! The idea! How lovely!" she cries, and they entwine in the typical and apparently necessary manner, while Aunt Addie expostulates to the air and I wring Fletcher's hand.

"You know, Chrissy is almost unnatural!" Thus Aunt Addie plaintively, to the air.

"Really, she's not like a girl at all! I don't mind Hugh so much, because he's a man and never was romantic, anyway, and of course it's useless to expect, now. But Chrissy never seems to think of those sort of things, at all, and it's not as if she were a really plain girl, either, so that sometimes I really wonder. . . ."

Well, there is this much to be said for poor Aunt Addie: pleased as Chrissy and I were at the wedding, for they were a fine couple and deserved each other "down to the ground," as we agreed, I'm not sure that we didn't regard the whole thing as a providential arrangement for getting the Doctor off for that wonderful, restorative year. We were best man and bridesmaid at the quiet little party at St. Matthews' and Mr. Applegate, ruddy as a winter apple, cheered us all in the vestry with his inimitable account of Chrissy's christening. How we laughed and how it all came back to me! It was the last wedding in the old church, for the new one was ready for consecration, and we all knew whose money was to support this one, where Bert had played the old organ. The architects were already at work over the addition with the inevitable shower baths and billiard tables that Fletcher insisted upon. Now there was a big phonograph added, with dance tunes and well-known choruses, and a stereopticon for round-the-world views, which his

THE INHERITANCE

faithful kodak sent regularly; the boys enlarged and exhibited them proudly to crowded audiences.

This, of course, we didn't foresee, that snowy morning in December, when Anne Fletcher, in her trim gray travelling dress (which carried, somehow, a hint of the uniform), shook hands all 'round, and left us, on her husband's happy arm, for the little honeymoon trip to Virginia that was to precede the long tour.

Chrissy wore the top-of-a-biscuit coloured dress, made up for the occasion, with a beaver hat to match, with brown silk roses on it. Around her neck, above the fluffy lace that filled in the shield-shaped opening Aunt Addie had insisted on the dressmaker's cutting out, twinkled a beautiful topaz necklace set in antique silver, the bridegroom's gift. It caught and repeated the notes of light in her eyes, and I realised that they were flecked with light brown, champagne tinted. I mentioned this to Aunt Addie, with the remark that I had not noticed it before.

"Humph!" sniffed Aunt Addie, wiping her eyes (for, like all women, she cried at weddings), "there's a lot about Chrissy you haven't noticed, Hugh!"

Whereas I smiled, as people have always smiled at their aunts and always will, doubtless, until they arrive at the stage where there is no giving in marriage, and therefore, presumably, no resultant aunts.

The Doctor was as excited as a boy, for except for a tour in Switzerland before the war, he had never been abroad. I wondered, on one occasion, as he gave me a shrewd look and said lightly:

"Well, a year certainly ought to settle these addled old brains of mine, eh, Master Hughie?" I wondered, I say, if he suspected, perhaps, more than we thought? Warwick was delighted at his treat, and showers of soap-cases, steamer rugs, spirit lamps and diaries descended

WE TAKE OUR EASE

upon us, to Aunt Addie's pride and joy. Aunt Addie was fairly renewing her youth, in these days. Although the two years of the Doctor's helplessness had been very quiet ones for us, we had never quite lost the social relations that had begun to be ours since Chrissy made a home for us—mysterious fact, that, for certainly no one could have depended for social support on Chrissy! And wait a bit, on thinking back, I seemed to see that our connection, infrequent, but admitted, with the "important people" of Warwick really antedated the house furnishing (when we began to have people in to tea) and harked back to our college days and the beach parties. But all those friends we made at Crane's—and who got us into Crane's? Why, I did! Actually, if I hadn't gone to Crane's, I doubt if Rob would ever have married Alice Larson!

It was just after we went down to the Warwick dock to see them off that Alice died—a quiet, unassuming sort of death that included, fortunately, the little too-soon-born creature that was responsible for it. Chrissy and Hux and I went to the funeral, as we had gone to the wedding, three years before, and then we went up to Woodlawn, in a blinding snowstorm, and laid her beside her father there, and Rob went off in his black tie, to live at his club, and that colourless little chapter was closed. But he came to us for Sundays, and really seemed to enjoy it, and got into the way of dropping in of evenings and stopping the night so often that when Aunt Addie said one day:

"Do you know, I believe Rob would like to live here, Hugh and Chrissy, and go into town every day—and Nana thinks so, too!" we suddenly perceived that she was right. We cleared the Doctor's books out of Miss Riggs' room (we begged her pardon—Mrs. Fletcher's!) and he

THE INHERITANCE

sent for those of his own that he used the most and settled down into his father's bedroom, more contented with the old house than he had ever been, I believe. For Rob had always been the most ambitious and the least satisfied with our shabby carpets and capless Bridgets and Norahs.

That was all changed, now: the Celtic wave had subsided, and Hilda and Senta, stolid and immaculate, moved blue-and-white of mornings, black-and-frilled of afternoons, over our polished floors.

Yes, the cheese-paring days were over, now, and there was no more consulting necessary as to desserts for Hux or some one to polish Rob's shoes. When I started out on some hurried evening call, I could meet Rob and Chrissy in the warm, light hall, ready for one of the quiet, family dinners Warwick was only too ready to urge on them; Rob tall and distinguished, if rather gray and worn for his age, in his evening Inverness, Chrissy vivid in the white, slightly *décolleté* dresses he liked so much to see her in. He had given her some handsome laces that had belonged to Alice, and her full, creamy neck, with the tiniest hint of white shoulder showing under the topaz necklace, justified his taste. He kept a pair of chestnuts in the stable and drove her himself in a high English covert-cart, with Thomas, erect and amused, in the rumble.

Often as we stepped out together onto the well-lighted porch (enclosed in glass, now, for the winter) I would catch Aunt Addie's satisfied nod at Hilda's soft announcement:

"Petersen iss ready for you, Doctor, and Thomas iss just behind for Miss Chrissy and Mr. Caldwell. Your coat, Doctor."

And I get into my great-coat, musquash-lined, and

WE TAKE OUR EASE

Rob helps Chrissy into her warm, long sealskin (Fletcher fitted us all out at Christmas, from Aunt Addie down!), and we roll out over the hard, moonlighted road, with much clinking and stamping—for the Caldwells *will* have that kind of horses, as anybody in South Warwick will tell you.

And if it is a little startling to find that Chrissy is dining or lunching out (no question now of calming outraged Hibernians with hot-supper subterfuges!) at least twice a week, and that your evening clothes are laid on the bed, doctor, as Mr. Caldwell has four extra to-night from the city,—if these changes are not entirely delightful to a hardworking physician, why, think of what a pleasure it must be to Chris! The poor girl never has had a chance since she left school, you know. If her girlhood's pleasures are a little late in coming, would you grudge her a taste, now that the strain is off and that there is someone with the sense to flatter her into low-necked dresses? For shame!

So we tell ourselves, Aunt Addie and I, over many an evening of *tête-à-tête* backgammon, while Chrissy is listening to the new concerts that come up from New York, now, to the new Warwick Casino, chaperoned by Mrs. Levi Bragg, escorted by Mr. Caldwell ("Larson's son-in-law, you know, my dear. His father is on a yachting tour with that young Fletcher that did so well.").

It ought to have been the happiest and most successful year of my life, for I was called twice to New York to assist in most important operations and refused a most flattering hospital offer. All I can say is—it wasn't. Before he left, the Doctor had sold most of his outlying real estate (at prices which justified every cent of the money he had tied up twenty years ago, by the way), and had made over to me, directly, such a proportion of it as

THE INHERITANCE

I couldn't have accepted without the hearty insistence of both the boys. That they did so insist was one of the great prides of my life. The terms of our future partnership, too, were more than I could have asked, and that I should inherit the whole practise went without saying. After his year of travel, it was quite clear that I should be freed from much of this year's overwork, for no one could doubt, by this time, that he was quite ready for as many of his old patients as wished his services. His bi-weekly letters to the *Sentinel* (real little gems of observation and humour) had established this to every one's satisfaction, and a subscription was on foot to publish them, as a surprise and souvenir for him. Yes, Warwick was proud of the old Doctor, and had forgotten its doubts by spring.

But with all this, the fact remained that Hugh Caldwell, M. D., well fed, well dressed, well housed, and well paid, was not happy. Dr. Hunter, who had amused us all by proposing to Chrissy and apologising to us for it, on the ground that he simply had to get it over, suggested that our cook was too good. It's true that I thought of Chrissy's little red account book and the necks of mutton, and sighed. The Doctor caught it from my letters and worried about my overworking. I wrote him a bullying letter, and sighed again. Rob said I didn't "get out" enough. I raised my eyebrows, looked at my growing visit book, and sighed again.

Indeed, the only thing that kept that year of the Doctor's absence from being one of the dullest of my existence was my ceaseless if secret work at trying to reduce to form, literary or scientific, or both, my ideas of what we both believed to be the truth about his accident. I was very shy about letting him discuss it, but just before he left, I realised that he had given far more thought

WE TAKE OUR EASE

to it than I had dreamed of. He laid before me a signed and witnessed statement, got with some difficulty from Nana, who could hardly bear to discuss the matter, as to all that old Beulah had said before her death. He had also got from Hunter, who had taken a few notes at the time of the accident, a pretty full account of his own ravings and delusions in the hospital. Now, he urged me to state for him my curious sensations at the time of my discovery by the roadside that he actually lived, and had not been a victim to the deadly electric fluid. With the skill of a professional cross-examiner he forced me to admit that I had experienced unpleasant and inexplicable doubts, at the time when his eyes had first met mine, and under this examination, all my old, halting, incredulous fancies surged over me again, and I was as keen as he. We corresponded more fully about it as the months went by and I perceived that the grim science-shaking thing we both glimpsed, feared and dared not dismiss as absurd, did not unsettle or distress him. He took all such things very simply and steadily.

When, for instance, we told him of Cary's death, as we soon had to, we, I believe, were more moved than he.

"Ah, well, poor lad! It had to come, of course. I wonder we kept him so long, Hugh. You made a happy home for him, my boy—you and Chrissy."

That was all he said. And he had taken Bert's loss—the bitterest of all—with a manly fortitude that seemed almost stoical.

So that this, the most startling conception, surely, that humanity has ever been urged to face and accept, he faced and accepted as if he had been an onlooker merely—not the subject of an obsession we hardly knew how to put into black and white.

How did that tramp know Beulah? He had long since

THE INHERITANCE

been identified, by my description, as a dangerous, violent fellow from Pennsylvania, new to our part of the world.

Why should he have taken that (apparently) worthless coin and left the valuable gold watch? It had cost no little time and strength to detach it. Only the Doctor and his family knew its value.

Why should Beulah have insisted that he was the Doctor, and so she was not afraid of him?

She was not the clearest-witted person alive, by any means, but she was never demented.

And whose were those ravings in the hospital? Were they the words of a clean-minded, clean-tongued gentleman—or did they come from the drink-fumed soul of another? Whose?

Well, I press you no further. Dismiss it from your well-balanced mind, most gentle reader, and forget that these scattered memories were, as a matter of fact, begun on my part, only as a frame for that experience. The papers we prepared together, later, for scientific publication (he had even thought of the medical journals!) were altogether too technical for my purposes: I was bitten, you see, by the literary idea, and, anyway, when we tried to hint it, long afterward, to the men who would have supervised its publication, I need only remember the way in which it was received to realise that a generation suspicious of hoaxing would have made the presentation through scientific channels almost impossible.

There was no way of breaking the ice, you see, of beginning. Unfortunately for our purposes, a wave of occultism, theosophy, imitation Buddhism, table tipping and what-not was sweeping over America just then, and the men we wanted to reach were too sickened with alleged miracles—roses dropping from the ceiling, tea cups mysteriously buried under the roots of trees, astral bod-

WE TAKE OUR EASE

ies and "materialisations"—to listen for a moment to what we had to tell, a story that would swamp all this petty prestidigitation completely! Why, my own first attempts to interest Dr. M—I and later, Mr. W—m J—s, then busily engaged in teaching the new science, psychology, to walk alone, produced effects that, so far from helping me, actually threatened my practise and frightened me as effectually as only the fright that empties the stomach and bares the back can frighten the bread winner. If by any chance either of these gentlemen should fall upon these memoirs (and sometimes I fear that they will never see print, so rambling and unfinished they seem, in a generation when every shop girl, it would appear, is a successful novelist and every newspaper reporter a finished playwright) will they remember the young suburban doctor—for Warwick began to call itself a suburb in the late 80's—whom they dismissed contemptuously to Mr. St—d and his spooks—the very last place the young suburban doctor wanted to go to? "Psychical Research," as anything unlikely began to be called, about then, with its rappings and tappings and slappings, as the Doctor called them, was no cause for a physician and his growing practice to identify himself with, and I never saw the day when, to be perfectly frank, I could have afforded it.

And as for him—how could he have endured the least breath of suspicion of oddity or unsoundness when he had built up, all his lifetime, such a reputation for conservative, sound methods? No, it couldn't be done. Even for the great sweepstakes, scientific fame itself, he couldn't run the risk. And I wonder sometimes as I walk the streets of some great city, wonder, as I have walked thus with him, into how many of the apparently normal lives surging by us along the pavement, some great, im-

THE INHERITANCE

possible shock may not have come, something called by us supernatural (though we are increasingly chary of the word, nowadays), something that would revolutionise the entire monarchy of science but for its untoward effect on this or that tiny individual, his reputation, his daily living, his life's love—and so dies with him and is only guessed at by a few. We are cunningly entrenched in our little camp of use-and-wont, and perhaps Nature has purposely run up her earthworks so high just in order that we may not see on how slight a neck of land we are balanced and how awful and shadowy stretch the gigantic hosts of the mysterious forces all about.

CHAPTER XXV

In Which My Eyes Are Opened

WE had a beautiful, late summer that year in Warwick, and the most gorgeous autumn foliage I ever saw there. October seemed September, and November never touched the frost line seriously. On the day our travellers reached New York I couldn't be of the welcoming party, for the hospital was crowded and poor Nana nearly beside herself with work and worry. The nurses had told me lately of symptoms connected with what she called her "little attacks" that looked ominous to me, and I was only waiting for the Doctor's return to use our combined forces and compel her to a long-needed holiday.

So I didn't meet them till the first excitements were over, and he was sitting in the office again, solid and ruddy, with a light, unaccustomed coat of tan over all, and a jolly ring in his voice that took me back to my boyish years:

"My George, Hughie, but it's good to see you!" he called out to me, and no father and son ever grasped heartier hands than we.

What an evening we had! The Fletchers held Rob and Aunt Addie speechless with plans and reminiscences, and Chrissy and I, she on her hassock by his knee, one hand in his, went back to the old times, our years fallen off at the sight of his new-old vigour. My spirits eased and lightened suddenly and I realised that my long three

THE INHERITANCE

years' pull of double work and worry was over. Never, curiously enough, had I felt the need of his age and experience so much as in those years when I myself was advancing so rapidly in both! Never had I understood so well why the community loves and needs its "old doctor." And now that he was back, and I might venture on that little vacation every one was prescribing for me, somehow, I didn't feel the need of it! Here we were, we three, together again—wasn't that enough?

In the morning he and I went over the hospital together, and as we discussed a curious medico-legal complication of the sort that occasionally puzzles both professions and he said, "I must speak to Rob about that this evening: he'll help us out," Nana suddenly appeared again beside us; she had had her private greetings, be sure.

"Mr. Rob just walked by, Doctor," she said quickly, "with Miss Chrissy. I saw them from the sun parlour."

"With Miss Chrissy, eh?" he repeated slowly; "well, well! What do you think about all this, Nana? According to what I hear, there seems to be a general idea . . ."

"Yes, sir, there's a good many thinks it's likely, Doctor," she replied quietly.

"Thinks what's likely?" I said roughly, catching and holding her unwilling glance; "what's likely, for heaven's sake?"

"Mr. Rob and Miss Chrissy, Master Hugh," she answered simply, and the strange look in her steady eyes gave me a curious, sad thrill, through all my stifling, furious rage. "Hadn't you heard any talk of it, then?"

For a moment the disgust and shock of it gave me sensations of actual nausea.

"What damned nonsense!" I cried shortly, and turned on my heel and left them standing there.

MY EYES ARE OPENED

With precisely the sensation of one in a dream I found that I was out of the building, somehow, and striding angrily through the grounds, then out into the fields into which the cultivated park melted. How I knew which way they went, I can't to this day tell, for all that district was full of tempting walks (*lovers' lanes—faugh!*) and there was absolutely no clew. Nevertheless I had no shadow of doubt that I was on the direct track and, indeed, I must have followed precisely in their footsteps. No insulted brother, no wronged and passionate father ever boiled with a more elemental rage than I—the thing was disgusting, incredible!

"A good many thinks it's likely," forsooth! The more fools we, to take him in amongst us!

Like a hunting dog I tracked them and I ran them to earth—though not in time, alas! There are some situations that a deaf mute of a savage, a vestal virgin grown from infancy in a guarded tower, couldn't fail to grasp, and this was one of them. Chrissy sat on a low boulder at the edge of a trodden path, her scarlet, hooded golf cape bright in the sun, her leaf-brown skirt melting into the leaves at her feet. Her strong, white hands were clasped about her raised knees, her face drooped toward Rob's. He crouched, half length, beside her, cap off (*bald, at thirty-six!*) and as I checked and stood at gaze, I saw his arm slip about her knees, over those firm hands. I could have shot him as he sprawled there.

In full sight, like a couple of Warwick's "Dublinites," from the Tracks! A nice way to treat a girl! Had she no pride, herself, no reserve? He was begging, the snob, he was begging, every line of his body besought her, as he sprawled there, and I could no more interrupt than one can interrupt a priest administering the sacrament or a mother nursing her child. Nature guards those

THE INHERITANCE

moments for her own purposes, and even on the stage, the lovers must have their kiss before the swords rush on from the wings. Nor could I wrench away my eyes, even, when Rob put his arm around her bending neck and took his kiss, though I shook, literally, with rage. Then she said a few words, and he got up lightly, took the hand she held out as calmly as if he had never come any nearer—(*O women! even the most dignified, even the most comradely, how sly, how prepared you are!*) put on his cap again, took it off gallantly and walked rapidly away from her toward the Asylum Road.

She sat there, in absolute quiet, and I waited till he should be absolutely gone, then rounded the rock that had sheltered me and strode straight at her. Honestly, in that moment, I detested her! For ten years I had not been so angry.

“So this was it, all along!” I cried furiously, before I had reached her.

“Good morning, Hugh,” she said quietly. One would have supposed we had met by appointment.

“Oh, nonsense!” I said, “do you suppose I don’t know? I tell you I was here, all the time!”

“So I thought,” she answered.

“You thought! you thought!” I repeated, irritated increasingly by her calm, “and you thought I saw him kiss you, too, I suppose?”

She gave me the most curious look I have ever seen in a woman’s eyes.

“I thought you wouldn’t mind,” she said. Just that.

The extraordinary complication of this simple sentence gave the last shove to my sliding self-control.

“Mind!” I cried, “*mind!* For God’s sake!”

Then I lowered my voice, as women do before they strike.

MY EYES ARE OPENED

"A charming way to celebrate the anniversary of one's wife's death," I said harshly, "quite worthy of Rob at his best!"

Yet she did not wince. Her control was unnatural.

"Rob's life was not happy, Hugh," she said.

"Indeed," I sneered, "but you hope that with his first wife's income his second may make him happier, eh? Is that the idea?"

She shook her head vaguely.

"You know, I never thought money was——"

"Oh, bosh!" I interrupted, beside myself with that horrible, oppressive rage that literally stifled me, "bosh, Chrissy! So he's to eat his cake and have it, too! Well, he always was clever—I'll say that for him!"

"You were all clever," she said softly, looking beyond me over the quiet, sun-steeped hills.

"By George, you ought to know!" I burst out suddenly, "you've tried 'em all—except Hux, that is. How did Hux manage to escape, I wonder?"

This was not pretty conversation, gentlest of readers, and I don't offer it as a Compendium for Young Gentlemen in Difficult Situations. But something was bruised and shocked in me, down below the layer of chivalry, down below the conventional plane of heroes in ladies' novels, down below my own heart. Something was bleeding in the depths of me, depths that had never been cut before, and I tore at the wound myself and hit out blindly.

"How did Hux escape?" I repeated, in an ugly voice.

The amazing, the incredible girl actually smiled!

"Poor old Hux!" she said gently, "he proposed to me when I was sixteen!"

This was too much. I laughed violently.

"Excuse me," I began satirically, after the disagreeable

THE INHERITANCE

noise I made stopped abruptly, "but it was too absurd! All the Caldwells! And poor Aunt Addie complaining that you don't understand 'those sort of things!' And all the while . . . all the Caldwells!"

"All but one," she corrected gravely.

"What? You mean that Bert never asked you, after all?"

"Oh, yes," she said, very low, "Bert did—really—I think."

"Then, what do you mean—'all but one'?"

She rose suddenly and stood before me, taller than I, for she was on the slope.

"You never did, Hugh," she said, and stood still.

"What?" I cried, staring at her as one stares at a ghost, "*what?*"

"You never did," she said again, and looked full into my eyes.

And then, as I stared at her in a sort of terror, that deep wound below my heart burst, and flooded me from brain to heels, and the stroke that fell upon Saul of Tarsus was as summer lightning to the glare that opened my blind eyes on that autumn hill.

So that was it! That stifling, grinding ache was not rage—it was jealousy! I wanted to shoot Rob because I was *jealous* of him—not because he was in love with Chrissy. Why, we were all in love with her! We always had been! With Chrissy!

And suddenly it was as if a veil unrolled between us, up and up, like the curtain of a theatre, and I saw her as she really was: no comrade, no housemate, no sister, but a beautiful, dark woman, a proud young Juno in a crimson wrap, with deep, wine-brown eyes, where mine dipped and plunged and sank—and never saw with the old vision again!

MY EYES ARE OPENED

This was Chrissy—this wonderful, flushed thing with the bust and shoulders of an antique Roman, the brave forehead of a friendly boy! This was Chrissy, with hands made for other things than mending, and lips curved for vastly different kisses from those she gave her nieces! This had always been Chrissy—with a warm, red heartful of love trembling and spilling at the brim, and I had drunk from it for years, yes, had lived on it for years, and never known what I drank nor that it made my own life's blood!

I felt a curious weakness in the calves of my legs and had the absurd sensation that I should soon have to sit down, but I scorned such a concession and fought myself steady, while we faced each other. Then I found my arms outstretched and would have said her name, but that no sound came out of my throat, after all. I could not have moved to her, literally, and moved straight, but they have more control than we, under this spell, and she obeyed my eyes and walked, at first with tiny, halting steps, then in a wonderful, rushing stride into my arms.

“Really, Chrissy?” I whispered to her.

“Oh, yes; oh, yes!” she whispered back, and lifted her face up to me. (*I don't recall being offended with her lack of reserve.*)

The whole afternoon we stayed there, and the day waited for us and the year—the last of those wonderful Indian summer days. Not a leaf, brown, yellow or scarlet, stirred, for there was no more wind than in August, and the soft, melting haze hung over the hills that make a cup of Warwick Valley, and turned everything the color of bloomy grapes. The air smelt of warm, wet leafage pressed into the fragrant earth, a winey, satisfying odour—the best, except for apple orchards in August, I think, that the year has to offer. The blue of the

THE INHERITANCE

sky was that unspeakable, fleckless blue that Italy spells for the foggy British (we wonder, here, why it doesn't impress us more!), and the low rock we sat on was sun-baked through and through. No human creature passed across our horizon—we might have been the first man and woman in the waiting world.

But what we said I cannot tell you. Perhaps you think there was nothing to say? "You knew her so well!" I can hear you carping at our tame Darby-and-Joan-ness. But I didn't! Blind fool, I didn't! It is true, I had gathered in the twenty-six years of our acquaintance a few superficial trifles of information about my wife which you, when you fell in love at the opera that night, or at the Jones's dinner party, had never had the opportunity of acquiring in regard to the lady in whose hands you placed your happiness and your bank-book. I knew, it is true, that she was honest as the day, absolutely vigorous and healthy, as brave as a lion. I knew that she was an excellent housekeeper, a strict accountant, a tactful, devoted daughter to the only parent who ever invited her to assume the relationship, a trusty, considerate sister, with little children, adoring and adored. I knew that she was cheerful in poverty, friendly in comparative wealth, good humoured and active at home and abroad. I knew that she never gossiped nor sulked nor nagged—and I had seen her during years when there were plenty of chances for these tendencies to exploit themselves. I knew of all these gifts, I admit: how many of them have you discovered, since, in your good lady?

Well, well, we won't press the matter. Perhaps Mrs. Blank was a beauty—or a genius. In my professional capacity I have attended ladies of each class, and I can only say I am grateful that Chrissy belonged to neither.

MY EYES ARE OPENED

Once that afternoon I recalled another person than ourselves.

“Did Rob go——”

“He’s gone back to New York,” she said.

“Poor Rob—I’m afraid he’s not had a very happy life, after all,” I added thoughtfully, and she answered:

“No, I’m afraid so, too.”

Some happy instinct sent us back before the sun fell too low, and we can never, now, remember that day as anything but leaf-scented and wine-coloured.

We passed by the hospital, but stopped, for Nana, wrapped in one of the roof-patients’ blanket-coats, sat waiting on the block under the *porte-cochère*. She rose and hastened toward us, then dropped the coat hastily and caught me in her arms.

“Is it all right, lambie—is it all right?” she cried, and my voice was husky as I kissed her kind, wet cheek. I had never seen her so moved since I was a child. She and Chrissy looked long at each other, and I knew, then, that in that look my old nurse resigned her charge for the first time in my life! It touched me strangely, that look of theirs, and I realized sharply how every man of us passes inevitably from one woman’s hands to another’s till that day when the last woman makes us ready for our last bed. Truly, a strange, blind sex: we are given over to them as so much putty—and they ask us for more power!

CHAPTER XXVI

In Which We Go Honey-mooning

AS is usual, in these cases, our family utterly surprised us by their attitudes. The Doctor, whom I suspected of grasping the whole situation, was as genuinely surprised and shocked as if I had wanted to marry Aunt Addie, and Aunt Addie, herself, far from dissolving into incoherent tears on my shoulder, merely sniffed and said with some vexation, "Hmh! And high time, *I* should say!"

From then on, the events reeled by us; we could hardly catch up with our own wedding, so fast it came upon us. If I had not seen with my own eyes the great white "solitaire" on Chrissy's hand, I should have said that we were never engaged—only married. I remember that we carefully planned the details of a quiet ceremony in the drawing-room (in a top-of-a-biscuit-coloured travelling dress) only to find ourselves in a glistening train made out of an Indian-brocaded shawl, and a diamond spray clasping orange blossoms, walking up the new St. Matthews' aisle among the Christmas pine and holly, a vested choir and four small, snowy bride-maidens before, and all Warwick behind us.

I recall stumbling through a congestion of presents, presents, and more presents; presents on the veranda, in the hall, under the piano—Mississippis and avalanches of presents, boxed and crated and tissue-papered and wash-leathered.

I recall Black Molly, with white satin streamers at her

WE GO HONEY-MOONING

ears, and Thomas with a white rosette, and Chrissy's voice saying temperately, "Never mind, Hugh, it pleases them, dear!"

I recall the sailing-master of Larson's yacht, smiling and laying his finger to his gold-braided cap. I recall the worst attack of *mal-de-mier* in my experience and my consequent horror and humiliation. I recall hours of dull and dreamy bliss after that inferno, and then I am driving in a rattletrap victoria, with Chrissy, over a snow-white road with groups of feathery palms here and there, shining, thick-leaved foliage, unexpected rose-coloured blooms, and a great, languorous, sapphire ocean crawling up over a level, creamy beach. There is a curious, verdant smell in the air, a happy tang of salt, a sense of lazy, luxurious hours with no duties. It is the island where I was born.

But not till after many of these lazy hours on the creamy beaches, where the dull pound of the surf covers from the inquisitive gulls our foolish, hungry happiness; not till after many secret sails alone on the surface of the crystal-clear blue, where the coral sways below, and the jewelled, flower-coloured fishes flash after each other like lovers' kisses; not till after many hours of marvelling silence under that great white moon of honey, did I take her with me on the not-all-unhappy hunt for the poor little grave I had told her of. And even when we found it, after some difficulty, and stood in the quaint, sleepy little churchyard among the tended graves, and gazed at the plain name on the stone—even then, I was too full of my great, new discovery, my wonderful, new, yielding Chrissy, to feel very much or very long for the fate of the poor woman who lay there. "*E. Palse!*" To me she was only a name; had I been much more to her, poor thing?

THE INHERITANCE

"It was Nana who *did* for you, Hugh!" Chrissy whispered, and I nodded soberly. Nothing in me cried out to the poor little dairy-maid that lay there, and as I stood, uncovered, by her ivied grave, my thoughts went back to the silent, faithful woman who had taken from her weak embrace the unwanted child that could only have stained her ignorant little life had that life been longer. Ah, well, it was better so.

Against my sordid little story, Chrissy's roots into Bermuda soil blossomed with an unlooked-for brilliance. Nobody but Nana and the Doctor knew what the picturesque island meant to me, but when Chrissy's parentage became known, the daughter of the beautiful Miss Le Fèvre came into a quaint and charming heritage of reminiscence and pretty history. In place of our confused and somewhat shamefaced memories of that curious, baffling, silent woman, surrounded by her books and inseparable from her bed, there rose gradually a clear picture of the dark, vivid creature that danced the sun up on the old battleships, flitted from bay to bay of the blue waters in her rigged canoe, and smiled victorious at regimental dinners—the toast of the town!

A water-colour sketch of her, in a dim, panelled drawing-room where long-dead bishops and blistered family portraits drowsed on the walls, showed her full, drooping mouth, her great, haunting eyes under the rolls of shadowy hair; an old slave, who had been used to groom her pony, grew garrulous over "Miss Genie's li'l, wee feet," and we saw the Colonel drinking champagne from her incredible satin slipper; her very pew at church, with a gardenia carved into it by some impious subaltern hand, brought a lump to the throat.

"As witty as Miss Le Fèvre," had passed into many a now-yellowed diary before the audacious creature left

WE GO HONEY-MOONING

for good and all the balcony hung with bougainvillea, and the great carved *sécrétaires* we bought for a song from a faded little landlady who remembered her well.

"The other young ladies said it was chock-a-block with love letters, my dear," gossiped this twittering dame, "and I assure you, we were all as glad as glad when 'Genie left Bermuda! The officers noticed *us* then! But the Island's changed, now—terribly changed. . . ."

And when I, invited on my wife's account to a great general's luncheon party, dined and wined below a famous battleship's deck because my wife's mother had jilted the Admiral; when I, who had looked loftily down upon little Chrissy Vereker and her eccentric family from the heights of Yale College and an assured income, thought on those things, I blushed!

But Chrissy, my honest, sturdy Chrissy, though she listened eagerly to the stories of this lovely, wilful mother and laughed, a little slyly, at the old gossips' confessions, turned to me, alone at night, and bent her straight troubled brows.

"It seems dreadful, Hugh, but I can't feel to her as I should think I would! You see, I never knew her, really. It was Nana that—that *did* for me, Hugh, just Nana! Always, all the time. You know, don't you?"

"Yes, I know," I said soberly, and in a flash I saw that patient, loving face. Ah, how the eyes searched mine! What a strange look in them, that day when Chrissy and I had come home—together, together forever!—and she had sat waiting for us in the roof-patient's cloak!

And how curious, how inexplicable, that we three, she and Chrissy and I, should be so rooted in that little bit of sand and rock in the midst of the ocean! Out of all the worlds in the universe, I and my mother, Chrissy and

THE INHERITANCE

her mother, to be linked together, there! Surely, "it was written," as the East says.

Of course, if you have not yourself experienced the fascination of such a transformed creature as the woman I loved and found in Chrissy (and there is not one chance in a million that you have) you will not be able to appreciate without an enormous effort of the imagination the rare and penetrating happiness of those sunny days. She seemed to shift and change, and come and go, so that I must test my bliss every hour—and always find it real! When she came down to our catboat with her packed basket (and I knew how well it would be packed, mind you!) taut and trim in white duck, tanned and sparkling under her wide Panama brim with the scarlet scarf, when she actually set her shoulder against the stern with me, I would forget for a moment. This was only Chrissy, good comrade for a picnic, peerless at luncheon baskets, practical rememberer of matches and extra jackets. Then, all of a sudden, it would surge over me.

"No, you fool, it's not—it's *Chrissy!* This stately, firm-muscled, proud-shouldered woman is yours—yours! Those glorious, brown eyes (make them meet your own!) are yours, and you may kiss them silent! Those firm, full lips (call them to you!) are for you—all for you! She loves you utterly and she will always love you—and you love her more than all the world together!"

If the fairy prince began the dance with Cinderella and ended it with a sparkling, glowing princess in his arms—does that open your eyes at all, gentle reader?

I had never danced with Chrissy until then. There were three battleships (English, of course) in harbour that winter, and two regiments quartered on the island, and a gayer little island never floated on the ocean! Two great bands flanked the polished, springy floor, and dash-

WE GO HONEY-MOONING

ing redcoats spun and glided over it, and more than one redcoat hovered tentatively near "that brunette with stunning shoulders from the States—a bride, worse luck!" But Chrissy didn't dance with the redcoats: she danced only with me—we had just met, you see!

"Did you always love me, Chrissy—always?"

(Do you know the waltz called "River of Years," gentle reader? Did you ever hold in your arms to its music the woman you had loved all her life—and known but six weeks?)

"I think so, Hugh."

"And did you always know I loved you—always?"

She smiles the old, wise, Chrissy smile, then suddenly blushes hot and flashes her eyes up at me—this strange, new bride, whose lips I have hardly learned.

"I think so, Hugh!"

Wonderful woman!

CHAPTER XXVII

In Which I Come Into My Inheritance

AND to think that it all happened long ago!" I seize her hand (that firm, warm hand, with all her heart in its faithful grasp) and kiss each of its five shapely fingers.

You foolish Chrissy! *Long ago?* As if there were any such period, while we are alive and love each other! You talk like a girl of twenty. When you know and I know and every sensible man and woman knows that Life, like that great Interpreter of life, has performed the miracle of saving the best wine till the last. It is only we who are past the growing pains can relish the great brew, and understand that the grapes must be well trodden and bruised before the flavour comes out.

And what a flavour it is! And how each new bud on the clustering vine enriches and strengthens the mellowing vintage! When we have learned (or think we have learned) every look of the women we love, when we have decided that there can be no possible bend of the neck more gracious and beautiful than that with which they turn their faces up to us—lo, then comes the day when that look curves down, down into the depths of their sheltering arms, and we see that final perfect picture for which the great Artist has prepared his canvas from the beginning!

And then, so irrational are we, so uncomprehending of all that sorrow has meant and done for us, that we vow

I COME INTO MY INHERITANCE

to stretch our grateful, passionate hearts into a wall about that mother and her child, and save them from life's only certain heritage: human tears. For who ever lived that did not weep?

Not that tears will fill too great a place in the childhood's memories of any of our five, thank God! The old red house has been all warmth and love and brightness for them; three generations of friendly, family life, twined together through the years, have taught them what seems to me the imperative lesson for this young country—that youth is not all; that though we worship, and rightly, round the cradle, the core of the house, that house is not merely a shelter for its precious cradle, but a roof-tree for the older growths that laid its rafters out of their own wood, that fed its roots out of their own blood—that need its shelter sorely, now that the north winds threaten their slow-running sap of life.

And I think there must be something strongly and magically preservative about this wine of family love and service, this reverent faithfulness to old tales, old sports, old customs of the clan; for who else in Warwick can compete with old Miss Caldwell and the old Doctor? When shaky seventy-year-olds cause themselves to be hurried to Florida, California or where not, at the first touch of the winter winds, they have but to sprinkle a few ashes over the glare-ice of their entrance-steps and the old Doctor will nimbly mount those steps and console with them on the lumbago or the bronchitis that sends them from "the healthiest town in New England, madam!" And Aunt Addie, who has completely outgrown the youthful maladies of her sometimes-complaining sixties, has never missed a meeting of the Ladies' Aid in fifteen years, and actually responded to a toast,

THE INHERITANCE

last year, at the big dinner of the Bert Caldwell Club on their founder's day anniversary at the great farm-and-trades school at Bragg's Hill! Even Khitmutgar holds, so far as I know, the record for pony longevity, for all the children but little Emmie have at least perched upon his ancient back, for photographic purposes, before he joined Black Molly, Odin (my first Great Dane) and the lengthening list of old friends in their orchard burial plot.

Darling Emmie! The only shadow of a quarrel that has ever risen between her mother and me concerns itself with the propriety of her being told, in the future, why she bears the name we gave her eight years ago. Only three people, now living, know why: Chrissy, the Doctor and I. Suppose that, once for all, I write it here, and leave it sealed in my great, carved Bermuda *sécrétaire*, so that if Chrissy ever changes her mind and places the truth above Nana's dying wish, little dark-eyed Emmie, my only picture of her mother among our blond, cleft-chinned troupe, may know, and then forget if she will, or can.

But I like to think that no blood of mine, still less of my lion-hearted Chrissy, could ever forget that story of a love so great, so granite-like, so infinite.

You may be sure that only Nana and the Doctor shared those five vigils that brought our five lusty young citizens to the light, for the white-capped auxiliary that prudence recommended in view of Nana's occasional "attacks" (undoubted cardiac rheumatism, unfortunately, but greatly modified for the better on her leaving the hospital for good), this eager helper, I say, passed most of the time in Aunt Addie's room, to her own dignified displeasure.

But with our last daughter, prudence was justified,

I COME INTO MY INHERITANCE

finally, for hardly had Nana given the little creature into her mother's arms, when the terrible old pangs caught her, and the auxiliary force was hard pressed indeed. After days of doubt, she rallied, but I kept her in her bed, where she fretted nervously, and aged suddenly, years, it seemed, before our eyes. Her hair, hardly iron grey, whitened entirely, and the whole broad, hale body seemed to shrink and refine as she lay there.

Before I would allow her from her room, Chrissy was visiting her there, and the baby, "the last that ever I'll help you through, I doubt, Miss Chrissy," lay staring at nothing, on the bed between them.

It was Chrissy, of course, who thought of the plan, and I, by her request, who told Nana, one night when I was watching by her bed—the Doctor's old bed, abandoned when he moved downstairs.

"Nana," I said gently, to rouse her from the vacancy I hated to see creep over her lined face, though I knew it meant physical peace, at least, "Nana, you haven't asked about the baby's name."

She pulled herself back from the tide that crept, always ready, to float her out of consciousness, and smiled faintly.

"No. What's it to be, then, doctor?"

"Chrissy thinks," I said, "and I think, too, that taking it all in all, there is no woman's name that can mean more to us than the name of the woman who did more for us—yes, both of us!—than any other woman in the world. We've been looking back, Nana, and we can't go so far back, either of us, that we don't find you behind us—do you realize that, dear old nurse?"

She smiled, a beautiful, wavering smile. "Ye think so, then, do ye, lambie?" she murmured.

THE INHERITANCE

"Why, Nana, you helped Chrissy into the world—you remember?"

"Ay, I remember," she answered.

"And when I was born—you were there, I think?" I said, cautiously, for I knew she would not wish to dwell on that topic—the silence of her life.

But she did not frown.

"Ay, I was there," she said simply.

"And all my life—why, Nana, how you worked for me when I was small! You don't like me to speak of it, I know, but you can't think I forget!"

"No, lambie, no; I know you don't forget," she repeated, and moved her hand over weakly toward mine.

"Why, Nana, I never should have known Chrissy, except for you! Do you realize?"

"I doubt ye never would, and that's the truth," she answered, and her old, keen smile grew around her mouth.

"So Chrissy and I think it will please you to know that we want to call the baby after you, Nana dear—we want to call her Esther."

She lay in perfect silence, so long that I doubted if she had heard or understood. I feared that the old reminiscences had been too much and that she was back in the old times—brushing and dressing me, perhaps, or tying Chrissy's pinafores.

"Did you hear, Nana?"

"Yes, lambie, I heard. But I'm thinking. Just wait a bit."

I waited, reassured, and the nursery fire whistled softly behind the old black guard and threw shadows on the Kate Greenaway pictures beside the mantel, marked with the growing heights of three tall boys, and a slender, graceful girl.

She drew a deep breath.

I COME INTO MY INHERITANCE

"You must call her Emma, Hughie," she said at last. I took her hand firmly.

"No, dear, no," I said, "I have thought it all out—I thought of it when I stood beside her grave in Bermuda—she's not to me what you are, Nana, and never could be. What can she be but a poor little shadow, when it's all said and done? All of that was buried when I began again, Hugh Caldwell, and I should feel like a hypocrite to go back, now. No, dear, Chrissy agrees with me, and you know how you trust her judgment! We want to name the baby after you."

"Then you must name her Emma, Hugh," she said.

I stared at her calm face.

"Dear Nana, think! You're confused with all the pain you've had. Emma Palse is buried in the little church-yard—in Old Paget, isn't it? You are Esther, Emma's aunt, that took me and brought me up, after she died. Don't you remember?"

"Ay, lambie, I remember fast enough. I took you and brought you up and did my best by you, and why wouldn't I? As Aunt Esther meant to do, no doubt. But 'tis her that's laid in Paget graveyard, dearie, and the stone says 'E. Palse,' for I was always one that lies stuck in my throat, even if they did no harm."

"Nana! What do you mean? Surely, not that you are—"

"I'm Emma Palse, dearie, that spoke out the letter that was took down, me not being to last long, as they all thought, and you read it at the lawyer's, as the Doctor told me, when you came back from your foreign travels."

"But then—but then, you must be—do you mean—Nana, do you mean that you are—"

"Yes. I'm your mother, Hughie," she said quietly.

Wave after wave of conviction rolled over me: I

THE INHERITANCE

knew that she spoke the truth. Nothing else could explain that lifelong, eager sacrifice, that passionate, ever-present devotion. Nothing else could have steered our frail little boat over all the troubled, black waters of that early life but that bright beacon of her motherhood—her motherhood that I had never so much as dreamed of!

I knew this, realized it—and yet I couldn't believe it, simply. I couldn't take her by force out of the position she had held for me all those years and put her, by any logical effort, in another.

"Nana," I stammered, "you must—you must tell me—I can't understand how—is there anybody that——"

"There's not a soul on earth that knows, my precious," she broke in eagerly, actually raising herself on her pillows and looking clearly into my eyes, "not one soul on earth. Aunt Esther went home to see about the money, and make all her plans to come back to Bermuda and take you to the States from there. And she signed all the papers, but 'twas in Sir Wilkie's library she did it, and the Geddie man never so much as saw her. And then when she was back by me again, she saw I was still hanging, like, betwixt death and life, and she got me—and you—out of those lodgings, for the fever was there. She was very bitter with me, poor Aunt Esther, and she took one of the black women's cabins, off near the beach, far out of Hamilton, to tend me in, and did for me all alone. And in the end, 'twas I that got well and she that died, for she had the fever, you see—'twas brought from London in the ship she sailed in. There was but a half-foolish old woman to help me out, but I was quite strong by then, and I had no thought of what I did, for it all came by accident, like. The doctor gave me a paper to sign, and I put down E. Palse, which was the way I signed

I COME INTO MY INHERITANCE

my own name, you see, and Esther E. Palse for hers, and when he read it over to me and signed his own, I saw by the way he read it that he thought me to be Esther, and that I had put my own name in the line where poor Aunt's should be.

“‘Is that right, Mrs. Palse?’ says he, and all in a flash I saw what I would do, and I nodded my head, for I couldn’t bear the outright lie. And he sent the papers to England and I put up the stone over her, and prayed her on my knees by the grave to forgive me, for what hurt could it do her? And I felt freer, like, and more able to do for you, Hughie, my lamb. And I did for you, didn’t I, my dear?”

“Why, Nana! Nana, is it possible? I can’t believe . . .”

“Oh, yes, dearie, your mother did for you! A hundred pound a year Sir Wilkie sent, and except for your school-ing and the college-ing there wasn’t a penny of it touched! All the rest your Nana earned, and earned honest, and what he sent was put by for you. So when you went back you went back a gentleman, didn’t you, dearie?”

I sat dazed. It seemed like the story of another man, told by a stranger.

“So, you knew when I went? You knew that I hadn’t any claim . . . you knew all the time?”

“God forgive me, Master Hugh, I knew—and yet I didn’t! How is a woman to be sure? Look at the ring he gave me, and me believing all the time! Eh, lambie, it’s a hard world for the women! And I bought me a plain gold band, in London, afterwards, like everybody’s. And I couldn’t but think when they saw you, so hand-some, and not begging for any money, and the image of—of him. . . . Ah, well, ‘twas in better hands than mine! Often’s the time I tried to tell ye, but my lips

THE INHERITANCE

seemed closed, like—‘You’ll undo all, he’s so proud,’ I’d tell myself. You’re not angry, Hughie?”

Angry? Oh, the poor meek thing! *Angry?* And it was on those brave shoulders my selfish young feet had climbed so long!

She fell back and seemed unconscious, though I could see no evidence of any pain, so that I knew those cruel pangs had not gripped the labouring heart.

Half unconsciously, as one acts in a dream, and depending entirely on the mechanical motions of long practise, I administered the necessary stimulant, my hand at her wrist, my ear over her heart. *Chrissy! Chrissy!* *What would Chrissy say?*

Her eyes opened slowly.

“You see how it was, Master Hugh? I only meant for the best, and one thing led to the other, and I hadn’t the heart to tell you. You see?”

“Yes, yes, dear, I see. Oh, Nana, I must call Chrissy! Let me get her, will you?”

She put her hand over mine.

“Not just now, lambie. I’ve a fancy to wait for that. I’m best alone with you—for now. You’ve not said you forgive me for telling you. For I couldn’t die with a lie on my lips, and you won’t grudge it, I know.”

“Grudge it! Oh, Nana, Nana! To think I never guessed, never thought! All the years I’ve been so careless, so——” I bit my lips with shame and confusion.

“Nay, nay, Master Hugh, there’s no boy finer than you, no, nor better thought of! I know. And if you were a little—a little *high*, sometimes, and I’ll not deny it . . . don’t groan so, and sigh, my own boy! Who taught you to be?”

She was whispering now, and wandering a little, I

I COME INTO MY INHERITANCE

thought, for she seemed to be in London and then in country lanes.

"See! I'm all over dew!" she said once, and laughed a little.

Then she was herself again, and took a solemn promise of me that I could not deny her, at such a time, and assured me *that my wife would not be so startled as I might think.*

"And a kiss for all the children—Nana's children—and would you say, once, now that you know, Hughie, would you say once, so that I can hear . . . "

She seemed to lose her voice suddenly, and begged me with her eyes, in vain, at first, while I tried to help her. Then, suddenly, it rushed over me, and I lifted her in my arms and held her close.

"Mother!" I called her, "my poor, poor mother! My dear mother!"

Her face melted into a beautiful smile.

"That's it! That's it!" she muttered, and nestled to me.

"My dear, dear mother!"

"Ah!" she sighed, and before I could lay her down, that great, tired heart had ceased its work for me.

And yet . . . and yet, who are we that we should use a word so blasphemous as "cease"? Am I to dare it, who have seen the life she gave me, born out of her love, flower through me and the woman-child she tended for me, into yet another generation of loving, laughing children? Can her life-long passion of silence "cease," while my life and the lives of all mine, speak aloud for her? Hand in hand we stood over her last bed, Chrissy and I, and saw together in one clear vision, the tree of our life, hers and mine, rooted in that great and steadfast heart, spreading through every twig and leaf into unknown

THE INHERITANCE

fortunes, sharing with every twig and leaf the eternity that is now and here as actually as it will be there and then. And we saw (clearer, perhaps, for our very tears) that the root of that great tree is as young and immortal as the tiniest pink bud it put forth but yesterday, and that the past is only behind us because we put it there.

Ah, no, my Chrissy! These scattered memories are only to keep us all together, she and you and I—for to those who love there is no Long Ago!

(1)

[THE END.]

University of California
SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY
405 Hilgard Avenue, Los Angeles, CA 90024-1388
Return this material to the library
from which it was borrowed.

OCT 18 1993

REC'D LD-URI

OCT 19 1993

AUG 28 1998

UC SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY



A 000 071 323 0

